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# THE MAGIC PLANT



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*Prometheus Unbound*: AN INTERPRETATION

# The Magic Plant

*THE GROWTH OF SHELLEY'S THOUGHT*

By

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Chapel Hill

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*Manufactured in the United States of America  
by the Van Rees Press, New York*

The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N. C.;  
The Baker and Taylor Company, New York; Oxford Uni-  
versity Press, London; Maruzen-Kabushiki-Kaisha, Tokyo;  
Edward & Evans Sons, Ltd., Shanghai; D. B. Centen's  
Wetenschappelijke Boekhandel, Amsterdam.

## PREFACE



THE history of Shelley's reputation as a poet should be made the theme of such a book as Professor Chew's *Byron in England*. Critically it would be even more important, for though Byron's reputation has fluctuated widely, there has never been much misunderstanding of his verse; his thought is too simple for that. Shelley, on the other hand, has never been wholly understood; has, indeed, for the most part been thoroughly misunderstood. The history of Shelleyan criticism has been of the tardy and reluctant perception in his work of qualities once denied him. When the first indifference or abuse with which his work was met during his lifetime had been succeeded by recognition of its originality, it was as a lyric poet that he was admired. His unfortunate radicalism was condoned or ignored and what had at first been condemned as the immoralities of his personal life were more or less excused on the score of youth or his addiction to perverse philosophies. In the course of years it came to be believed by charitable minds that his intentions were good but that he was singularly unfitted for the realities of this world, was a vague dreamer and idealist who had fallen into rather more errors than usually beset even visionaries. Hogg's *Life* sedulously cultivated the fiction that Shelley was an impractical fool who needed the support and guidance of stronger and more sensible natures. Mary Shelley, also, by too greatly stressing the emotional character of his poetry did much to minimize its intellectual qualities, despite her statement that *Prometheus* concealed philosophic ideas of the greatest originality. Inasmuch as she had but a hazy notion of these ideas and could not impart them to others, her words were passed over without remark and attributed to her wifely devotion.

Nevertheless, as the ideas of the French Revolutionary period came again, to some extent, into popular favor, reformers and radicals derived considerable sustenance from such poems as *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam*. Shelley as an Utopian dreamer had painted a picture of what human society might become which was alluring to many minds; and he had denounced in words of memorable eloquence social evils still unredressed. Chartists, and, later, Socialists,

found him spiritually akin. He had given emotional expression to ideas which were slowly winning adherents. It was felt, and rightly, that his poetry was a powerful instrument of propaganda. Yet even so he was not considered a thinker with a realistic view of man and society, nor a philosopher whose ideas might repay study. Indeed today, more than a hundred years after his death, to most readers of poetry Shelley remains no more than the "beautiful and ineffectual angel," of Matthew Arnold's singularly unperceptive characterization. The limitations of Arnold's intelligence could scarcely better be intimated than by a phrase so inept. Arnold, too, was a classicist and presumably familiar with the Greek and Latin sources of much of Shelley's philosophy. What he made of *Prometheus* or *Hellas* and many another of Shelley's poems is not, so far as I know, on record, but it must have been little. In a poet, and a highly educated poet, this failure to apprehend the intellectual background of Shelley's poetry is nothing less than amazing. Arnold seemingly classed Shelley with the rest of the Romantics, whom he disliked, and let it go at that. Thus the poet in many ways the most classical in English literature was ignored and misunderstood by the high priest of Classicism.

Shelley's rightful place as a thinker will not soon or readily be accorded him. Historians of literature and critics will go on for a long time repeating traditional absurdities without examining the origins of them or studying Shelley anew without prejudice. Yet in time a new understanding of a great poet must be effected. His poetry is too beautiful and its thought too deep for permanent neglect. Perhaps even the gossip and scandal interest which so largely animates the biographies of Shelley will in time be diminished. Shelley's conduct already seems less scandalous to an age which is accustomed to easy divorce and extra-marital sex relationships. When any newspaper can report episodes more titillating than those to be found in his life, Shelley conceivably will come to be valued for what he wrote and the facts of his life be allowed to fall into their subordinate and due place. It makes little difference what Shelley's history was provided we can understand what he wrote. His mistakes and misfortunes were his own and should be buried with him. His work remains as a gift to mankind. It was bought at a considerable cost in pain. It is well, no doubt, to remember what the cost was and so better appreciate the value of the gift. But it was his thoughts which Shelley wished might be blown like dead leaves among mankind, sparks from an unextinguished hearth. It is they that live for us and it is they which should be our study.

The book to which these remarks are a preface attempts to trace the history of Shelley's ideas as manifest in his letters, his prose fragments, and his poetry. It is something more and less than the usual biography. The events of his life are stressed only as they seem, in my judgment, to have affected his thought. Emotion, to be sure, influences thought; therefore emotional experiences which have their manifest consequences in his work are included in this history of his mind, though for the most part I do not dilate upon them. An over-stress of emotion has been the curse of Shelleyan criticism. Shelley the thinker is distorted and obscured in the haze of emotional speculation. He is thereby wholly falsified, for if ever a man lived the intellectual life and was less the victim of unreason and blind emotion it was Shelley. He thought passionately. For him a beautiful idea was as exciting as is a beautiful woman or the thought of an illicit amour to some of his critics. Impassioned thinkers constitute but a small part of the human race, the part of greatest importance to be sure, but misunderstood, derided, hated, and crucified by the rest of mankind. It will be incomprehensible to many people that Shelley was not chiefly preoccupied with clouds, skylarks, and beautiful dream maidens; that he spent vastly more time and thought upon questions of practical politics, and upon the problems of good and evil, and of free will and determinism. Shelley's was a poetic mind but also a philosophic mind, realizing that ideal of poet-philosopher which he most admired in the great minds of the past. However less than they—and he would with characteristic modesty have thought himself far less—he was of their order.

My own incapacity to understand and trace the growth of a mind so great as Shelley's can be apparent to no one so much as to myself. His range of reading in science, philosophy, and the classical literatures is far beyond me. I have endeavored to discover in the books which most influenced him those ideas which shaped his thought. I have found, I am sure, some of them; certainly not all, nor can I have accorded them the relative values which will meet the approbation of all readers. Necessarily this is so, and it is desirable that it should be so. What is needed in the study of Shelley is a new point of view. Examine him as thinker and philosopher and immediately his work in prose and poetry takes on new and important meanings. Though we may differ as to these meanings, we shall nevertheless see their immense importance as living thought in the world of today. Shelley was one of the supreme individualists. The problem of the One and the many, of multiplicity in unity, was the preoccupation

of his thinking life. What is the purpose or the ideal of society? To produce as many individual and perfected beings as possible. The function of the state is to free the individual. The state exists for the individual, not the individual for the state. It is a philosophy now in disrepute. Today the totalitarian state is the ideal of various peoples. To the state, it is said, the individual owes everything and must surrender everything: his energies, his life, his very thought. Obedience is the chief of virtues. Obedience to what? Shelley would have us obey only the divine promptings within us. He is the greatest of Protestants among modern poets and thinkers. The world was never more desperately in need of the inspiration of his example and his ideas than now.

Therefore, however inadequately, I have endeavored to bring out by the collation of his letters, his poetry, and his prose fragments the development of his thought and the ultimate philosophy at which he arrived. The prose, which is so generally ignored by readers of his poetry, is of primary importance in this exposition. Shelley's intellectual history is not obscure provided one follows it chronologically and endeavors not to overlook any of his ideas. I have therefore summarized all his prose fragments except two or three which seem to me unimportant, and I have endeavored briefly to indicate the thought in all the poems which have to do with ideas. The comments, to be packed within the covers of a single volume, are necessarily brief, but sufficient, I hope, for my purpose, which is to demonstrate the genuinely great importance of Shelley as a thinker and the intelligible order of his intellectual development. In time more detailed and profound studies of various of his poems and of his philosophic ideas are certain to be made. Upon these a more comprehensive and exact history of his mind will then be built. I shall be satisfied if the present book, despite its inadequacies, shall have helped to the realization of so great an end. I feel for the recognition of Shelley's philosophic greatness the passionate concern which he felt for the recognition of ideas needful to the regeneration of the world; and the same impatience with a world blind to him as to them.

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# THE MAGIC PLANT

"I had rather err with Plato than be  
right with Horace."

LETTERS, II, 667.

"*Me*—who am as a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth."

*Julian and Maddalo*, ll. 449-50.

## CHAPTER I

### *Nursling of Revolt*



' OLD Bysshe Shelley, grandfather of the poet, is the most likely source of the eccentricity and genius remarkable in the latter, if indeed those qualities are accountable on the score of heredity. The Shelleys, though in no wise a distinguished family, were seemingly a respectable one, clinging to their lands and their traditions and making good marriages when occasion offered. Bysshe was the least respectable of the lot, a younger son of a younger son who yet by successive marriages to two heiresses became the most prosperous of the clan and died a baronet with a large estate of which more than £12,000 was found secreted in his cottage at Horsham. Like Byron, having exhausted most of the other vices, he had taken in his latter days to avarice.

It is yet pleasant to reflect that to this miserly blackguard the poet may have owed something, if no more than a gift for profanity. Legend has it that old Bysshe cursed his son and heir, the unfortunate Timothy, with great vigor and eloquence. And the grandson while at Eton is reputed, likewise, when set on by his compeers, to have cursed his father with similar picturesqueness. The anecdote, of dubious authenticity, marks no more, perhaps, than an old family custom of the Shelleys; or perhaps in the poet it signalizes the first stirrings of genius: through admiration of his grandfather's swear-words he was perchance cradled into song. If so, he was an ungrateful grandson, for upon the eve of the old baronet's death, he thus writes to his Egeria, Elizabeth Hitchener:

"I hear from my uncle that Sir B[ysshe] Shelley is not likely to live long—that he will soon die. He is a complete atheist, and builds all his hopes on annihilation. He has acted very ill to three wives. He is a bad man. I never had respect for him: I always regarded him as a curse on society. I shall not grieve at his death."

The Mendelians, I suspect, will be put to it to account for Shelley the poet in terms of his ancestry. Rather more can be made of the influences of environment and upbringing, as will appear; but such influences would have meant nothing had not the aptitudes of the boy been what they were. How account for the presence in this family of geese of a swan, and one so singularly black? Platonism is a more sat-

## A Stupid Father and a Weak Mother

isfactory source of explanation than science. When Shelley, like Laon, left the hall of the Immortals for a brief spell of missionary work on this miserable planet, he either selected his earthly residence quite haphazardly or else with ironic humor. He could scarcely have chosen a family or a class of society or a nation less capable of understanding and appreciating him. From his earliest years almost, he seems to have had little regard or respect for his father, a stupid, foolish, and conventional country gentleman who wished to do always what was expected of him and his position in society and who took his political orders from his patron, the Duke of Norfolk. Only by some theory of contraries or opposites can Shelley the poet accountably derive from Timothy Shelley, the browbeaten son of Sir Bysshe. Poor Timothy, execrated alike by father and son, had for his heir a changeling not spiritually his at all.

Early contemptuous of his father, who indeed was a very foolish fellow, nor one whose goodness of heart compensated for emptiness of head, the son seemingly found little affection and response in his mother. The references to his mother in Shelley's letters are few, nor is there in any, I think, a note of tenderness, even in early boyhood. Later Shelley believed her in collusion with his father to make him sign documents prejudicial to his advantage, or perhaps conniving at the plot to have him confined as mentally irresponsible, thus depriving him of his inheritance.

There seems to be a disposition among commentators and biographers of Shelley to dismiss Shelley's fears of his father's wiles as sheer hallucination, as evidence of a persecution complex; and the legendary intervention of Dr. Lind at a critical moment either as a fiction or as his parents' good-humored compliance with the fevered delusions of a sick boy. There is indeed some evidence that Shelley, like the rest of the world, was occasionally tricked by his imagination and so incapable of distinguishing fact from fancy. It is easy to make too much of these instances, to explain and excuse them as vagaries of the poetic mind, which is traditionally and quite mistakenly thought of as irresponsible. There have unquestionably been third-rate poets who were near madness; but high poetic gifts are accompanied by a superior and sound intelligence. It seems quite possible that Timothy Shelley in his desire to dispossess his heir in the interest of the younger brother, John, would have had his son sent to an asylum or committed any other legal crime to secure his end. Nor need such a plot have evolved to overttness to have been betrayed by its blundering inventor. The son may clearly have read the father's desire, the

## The Making of a Black Sheep 3

intent which never reached the plane of action. In later years Shelley was a shrewd judge of character. His mistakes, which were flagrant and have been too much stressed, sprang always from attributing to certain characters—to Hogg, to Elizabeth Hitchener, to Godwin, to Emilia Viviani—virtues which they did not possess. Like most generous natures he was of a trusting, even credulous, disposition, until, often deceived, he awoke to the realities of human nature.

It is my purpose to trace the history of Shelley's ideas and to depict his growth as rebel against custom and society. Many of the incidents of his life, his matrimonial mishaps, his infatuations, and the like, are not greatly important in this perspective. Too much of these—the gossip interest or scandal interest in Shelley—is habitually made! But I attach more importance than is customary to Shelley's home life and to the years at Sion House Academy and Eton. These were emotionally formative years. In them Shelley was, I believe, starved for love and kindly understanding. He found these in neither his father nor his mother. A little he found them in the love and companionship of his brother and younger sisters until they were weaned from him by parental influences. Very early he became black sheep and outcast. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this fact. Early and tragically he learned to do without the moral support of others, to become independent in mind and spirit. For a rebel such self-sufficiency is indispensable. A few people in later life loved Shelley to the verge of idolatry but the vast majority disliked him. Thus he became superior to the seductions of popularity and independent of the mass opinions of mankind. He was chosen for the small and select group of rebels and martyrs, those to whom happiness is denied but to whom is granted greatness of thought and deed and the barren praise of posterity.

It is evident from his sister Hellen's childhood memories of him as later set down that Shelley was all that an older brother should be, not teasing overmuch, and inventing out of an active imagination a fabulous tortoise inhabiting the pond, an equally fabulous snake of great age, and an alchemist, who dwelt in the attic of Field Place. That alchemist is important in the history of Shelley's mental life. We would give a great deal to know his origins, from what book and at what time Shelley drew him. Shelley's induction into the marvelous and the supernatural is a blank in his biography. Yet clearly he came to have at an early age a considerable knowledge of occult lore. It was food for his imagination and, presumably, led to his interest in science, for he was early captivated by electricity and

chemistry.<sup>1</sup> The anecdotes of his boyish experiments are too numerous to ignore. What books there were in Field Place which caught his boyish fancy are not on record. I should like to believe that among them were Paracelsus, the Oriental works of Sir William Jones, and the imaginative scientific works of Erasmus Darwin. These would have sufficed to start him along the track which he pursued in later years.<sup>2</sup> In him the tastes and interests of boyhood—in the occult and the strange, in science, and, later, in humanitarian reform—are blent, in the maturity of his thought, to a strange and compelling synthesis.<sup>3</sup>

Of his intellectual aptitudes other than an interest in occultism and science there is some evidence. A set of verses, metrically competent, survive from the age of eight but bear no signs of genius. An early obsession to adopt a child—a little gypsy girl, a tumbler, is a recorded instance—is, I think, of much greater psychological significance.<sup>4</sup> His later life and his verse bear witness to his lifelong desire to educate, to mold, the plastic minds of children. When he married he desired many children. In his mature years the desire may be explained in terms of the radical philosophy in which he had come to believe. To Rousseau and his followers and to all revolutionists the importance of education was paramount. Human society was to be altered by properly educating the young, by seizing upon them at an impressionable age and stamping them for life. Communist Russia and Fascist Italy subscribe to this belief today.<sup>5</sup> In Shelley the desire to educate and direct the life of a child was an early obsession and cannot, even in a mind so precocious as his, have come from a knowledge of Locke's psychology or *Émile*. It is a mysterious and extraordinary thing, not unique, but rare in early boyhood, evidence of a maternal, a feminine strain, in Shelley, or of some prenatal, some innate interest, whose explanation is most easily found in Platonism. Here, as in other instances, Shelley himself, in his mental history, his innate predilections, and in his developed powers is one of the best proofs that the Platonism which he came to believe in is more than an interesting but fanciful theory of the universe; is, indeed, mysteriously in accord with, and explanatory of, man's mind and world. :

Shelley's precocity did not take the form in which he was destined to greatness. It was not so much creative as analytical and acquisitive. He early had and retained an extraordinary memory, reciting long passages in Latin when very young. He had the kind of mind which absorbs unconsciously, with a great aptitude for words, and learned languages—later they numbered Latin, Greek, German, French, Span-

ish, and Italian—without much effort. His metrical translations from the German and the Greek are among the greatest, if not the greatest, in English. We have to explain, in tracing the history of his ideas, the extraordinary range of this reading. Add to his native precocity this fluency in tongues, together with his later studiousness and power of concentration, and the range and volume of his reading becomes explicable though amazing. Shelley's biographers and critics have too seldom credited him with what there is every evidence to believe he had read and absorbed in the fields of poetry, history, science, and philosophy, nor perceived the importance of this learning to his poetry. Intellectually Shelley was no less a prodigy than Coleridge. His childish and schoolboy tastes and acquisitions point the way to his scholarly eminence later, though hardly explaining it, for powers so unusual are not explicable in any true sense.

The information which has come to us of Shelley's years at Sion House Academy which he entered at the age of ten and which he attended for two years is neither exact nor trustworthy. Shelley's biographers, Hogg and Medwin, are inaccurate or worse, and there are few documentary data. Certain facts emerge, however, which can be trusted. Shelley absorbed the arid instruction of the day without effort; learning easily, he had much free time for daydreaming and for reading Gothic romances, which to boys of his day were what dime novels of adventure or the stories of Henty were to American and English boys seventy-five years later. Shelley's love of the marvelous was, throughout life, a distinguishing characteristic; and his later infatuation with neo-Platonism and the wonders of science are a natural development, in an intellectual nature, of his boyish infatuation for ghosts and alchemists and the incredible and sentimental romances of the imitators of Mrs. Radcliffe.)

'The awakening of his scientific interest may have occurred at Sion House Academy. A popular lecturer on science, Adam Walker, a man with a smattering of the new science, gave a few lectures at the school. Shelley's imagination seems to have been caught by Walker's assertion, based presumably on Herschel, that in the many worlds of a populous universe there were, in all likelihood, other planets like our own, with inhabitants perhaps more advanced in the civilized arts. Walker demonstrated also the solar microscope, an instrument which Shelley later possessed and cherished. This instrument by transmitted light throws the microscopic object upon a screen in a darkened room. It is easy to see wherein the wonders of the universe, whether as revealed by this instrument or by the new and improved



## The Toughening Process

telescopes of Herschel, should appeal to an imaginative boy, if, as in this instance, he was also a highly intellectual boy. The importance of Shelley's awakening to the world of scientific speculation, whether due to Adam Walker or to reading of his own, can scarcely be exaggerated in tracing his intellectual history. Seemingly it occurred before his twelfth year.

But there was in these early years, the years of his schooling, one other experience stronger even than his awakening to the fairy tales of science. At Sion House Academy Shelley became an object of persecution and learned the bitter lesson which all his subsequent life was to reiterate, namely, that he was "different," that the ways of the world were not his ways. Sion House Academy and Eton were probably no more brutal than other boys' schools, yet more than sufficiently so for a sensitive nature with that strain of the feminine which often characterizes boys endowed with genius. Boys are, many of them, little devils of callousness, and the schools of Shelley's time seem to have fostered bullying and cruelty. Boys respect strength only, and Shelley, though not a weakling, did not much care for or excel in boyish games. He seems to have been bullied from first to last but never cowed. He fought back, raging at his persecutors and extorting from them a degree of respect. They did not understand nor like him, but his spiritual courage occasionally daunted them.

Shelley learned early that the world is a bully, that to be different, though superior, is to stir the savage intolerance of boys and men. The knowledge did not break him as it does many. Boys less sensitive than Shelley have died of homesickness and persecution! Shelley was tough and found resources within himself, in his dreams and in his books. The effect in his early years was to shut him much within himself and to make him unduly responsive to, and credulous of, those who were kind to him! The mistakes of his youthful friendships and loves can be traced to this cause. Those who were decently kind to him won his devotion and trust. He was deceived often, though not always. Nor would it be just to suppose him wholly without friends either at Sion House Academy or at Eton. There were a few boys who felt his charm and gave him affection. Their companionship helped. Yet it is nevertheless true that he learned self-reliance, acquired a certain toughness, and an indifference to the judgments of his fellows which was to be of vast service in the part he was to play in the world. If, at heart, he was a sensitive creature, responsive to every vibration of beauty, he became nevertheless one not to be crushed by ugliness and persecution and cruelty.

'But there was in this toughness a degree of introversion.' He found his way of escape within himself. Egocentric, especially in his earlier years, he was at first unable to assess the world justly. His pathetic misjudgments of men and women were largely due to this inability.

For the Eton years there are more anecdotes, though of dubious authenticity, than for the years at Sion House Academy. Various of his Etonian contemporaries wrote in after life, when Shelley's was a growing fame, reminiscences recalling him as rebel, as "atheist"—one, that is, who rebelled against the masters—and as a precocious scholar who learned without effort the things required and had time to pursue his own peculiar studies. The authentic parts of these legends are consistent with what is known of the Sion House days. 'Shelley is even more the rebel than before, a rebel on a bigger stage and against greater forces.' Exact knowledge of the facts is impossible to come by but it is sufficiently clear that at Eton as at Oxford he did not please the tutorial mind, was frequently in hot water for contumacy, and pursued his self-education with success. What is to be gathered of his reading and his intellectual interests is, indeed, more important than apocryphal anecdotes recalled by schoolmates in after years.

The interest which he entertained in natural science grew during the Eton years. 'He' conducted forbidden experiments in electricity and chemistry. Such were unusual for a boy of Shelley's day when modern science was in its infancy and when it was possible for Davy to make discoveries in chemistry after three months of study. Those were the great days for the amateur in science. It was possible for an intelligent boy to come close to the scientific frontiers by a little reading and experimentation on his own. A modern boy's interest in machines, his play with electricity and airplanes, is, in the conditions of our times, not particularly significant of a call to science. In Shelley's day his persistence, amid hostile circumstances, in the study of electricity and chemistry indicates at the least a strong scientific bent; and it is evident from his later poetry that science definitely colored his thought and imagination and that his interest in the philosophy of science, if not in practical experimentation, persisted throughout his life. '

Two writers of antiquity, Pliny and Lucretius, whom he read at Eton, are important in the history of his thought. Of the two, Lucretius, as the more philosophical, has the greater interest, and it is a plausible surmise that the germ of *Prometheus Unbound* is to be found in the *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretius sought to free the mind

from the shackles of superstition and theology by substituting naturalism and science for myth and miracle. He glorified the reason personified in the legendary Prometheus, emancipator of man through the practice of the arts and sciences. The materialistic Shelley of the next phase, the disciple of Holbach, evolved naturally from the rebellious sceptical-minded boy who found in Lucretius a liberating influence. It is probable, too, that Lucretius, whose example was later reinforced by that of Erasmus Darwin, showed him that it was possible for poetry to deal with such seemingly recalcitrant material as scientific ideas. There is a deal of science in *Queen Mab*, his earliest work of poetical importance, as well as in subsequent works.

Equally plausible is it that from Albertus Magnus, whom he read at least in part while in Eton, he derived his first interest in Platonism. Albertus Magnus, amid all his varied lore, his compendium of medieval knowledge, is definitely Platonistic. That Shelley so early read any of Plato or the neo-Platonists in English translation is unsure, though Plotinus on the Beautiful may very well have come his way as it did Coleridge's at a comparable age. There is Plutarch also, whose *Moral Essays* may have introduced him to neo-Platonism and the rationalization of myth. That he read this work thus early is again unsure, but, on the face of it, likely. Speculations so uncertain have this value only, that they supply a plausible source for ideas found early in Shelley's work. Even in *Queen Mab*, with its avowed necessitarianism and materialism, there is apparent a philosophic strain contradictory in kind. Whence did this derive? Though we know much of Shelley's later reading, the first source of his idealistic philosophy, which was destined later to supersede his earlier materialism, must remain only a plausible surmise. To ascribe it to his Eton years, either to his reading or to the conversations with Dr. Lind, is surely more than a guess.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>As to the precise nature of Dr. Lind's influence we have unfortunately little evidence beyond Shelley's poetic encomiums. These are too little specific. We ask whether Dr. Lind introduced Shelley to idealistic philosophy, to the French revolutionary philosophers, and to the works of William Godwin. It is only by inference that we find an answer, but it is evident that Shelley learned something of Godwin while at Eton and therefore, presumably, of Godwin's teachers, Paine and Holbach and Rousseau. Dr. Lind was supposedly the guide to these authors, then in eclipse. At Eton it is unlikely any tutor would have dared introduce such heretical writers to his pupils. Dr. Lind, at Windsor near by, was in a different case. To him traditionally is

assigned the molding of Shelley's mind in its plastic stage. Whether that influence was good or bad is a matter of opinion depending on the critic's estimate of the value of Shelley's radicalism to his poetry and to his philosophy. Dr. Lind has, therefore, been variously cast, sometimes as a good genius, sometimes as evil, in his rôle of mentor to youthful genius. Perhaps his part as either is exaggerated, for Shelley would inevitably have happened on the books which fed mind and imagination. So omnivorous a reader was bound to find his needful sustenance.<sup>1</sup> Early, prenatally perhaps, he was destined to the rôle of rebel and defier of the conventional gods. Were it not *De Rerum Natura* and Dr. Lind it would be some other book, some other human agent of destiny he encountered.

At Eton Shelley pursued, also, his study of the occult. Presumably it is to this period that he refers later in his second letter to Godwin: "Ancient books of chemistry and magic were perused with an enthusiasm and wonder, almost amounting to belief. My sentiments were unrestrained by anything within me; external impediments were numerous and strongly applied; their effect was merely temporary." At Eton he endeavored, unsuccessfully, by magic spells to raise a ghost. The supernatural had ever for him an unusual fascination. It colors his poetry and his philosophy and explains in part the evident attraction for him of neo-Platonism and Theosophy, both of which profess a knowledge, if not the practice, of magic. It is unfortunate that the particular writers other than Paracelsus whom he read are unknown. But if not specific authors their kind can be inferred.

So much, then, for a brief summary of the intellectual forces and the significant books, so far as these are known, which influenced Shelley to the time of his going to Oxford. But even so early he was an author, and it is necessary to glance at his published works written prior to the autumn of 1810 before taking up later and more important matters. These early compositions of Shelley, in prose and verse, are of no literary value in themselves but they necessarily show us a part of what was in his mind, the things that interested him in his adolescence, and have therefore their significance.

*Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*, a small volume by Shelley and his sister Elizabeth, was advertised for sale by the publisher Stockdale in the *Morning Chronicle* of September 18, 1810. The poems had been previously printed and it was to extricate himself from financial obligation to the printer that Shelley turned over to Stockdale 1,480 copies of the small volume of sixty-four pages whose

seventeen pieces were composed presumably in 1809 and the early months of 1810. Stockdale alleges that after the volume was put on sale he discovered one of the poems to be a plagiarism from Monk Lewis, informed Shelley to that effect who, much exercised by his sister's innocent theft, ordered that the book be destroyed. Such are the facts of chief bibliographical interest with regard to the book. Its literary value is distinctly less, though it throws some light on Shelley's intellectual interests at the age of seventeen and the degree of his passion for his first love, his cousin Harriet Grove.

Opinions as to the last point must necessarily depend on individual judgments of the poems addressed to, or alluding to, Harriet. Inasmuch as Shelley was thus far an inexperienced poet and his verse stilted and imitative, sincerity struggles rather ineffectually with the artificiality of the medium. Still, the note is there, and the evidence, in conjunction with letters of a slightly later date, indicates that the separation effected by his family, which disapproved of the match, hurt Shelley more deeply than is usually thought. It is a curious forgetfulness which leads the middle-aged and elderly to make light of the sufferings of childhood and adolescence. Shelley as a boy suffered cruelly in the persecutions he endured at Sion House and Eton. He also suffered keenly the disappointments of first love. And in both, the herd tyranny of the schoolboy and the parental tyranny of his father and mother, however well intentioned—and the good intentions are surely questionable—Shelley found himself the victim of man's inhumanity to man. How deep were the wounds thus inflicted upon a sensitive boy, who can decide? When, later, Harriet Westbrook threw herself upon Shelley's chivalry, threatening suicide, it is clear that he accepted the challenge out of no great love for her. His affections were still engaged by the other Harriet alienated from him by family pressure and the fear of his heretical opinions fostered in her by his parents. Harriet Westbrook caught Shelley on the rebound, and with the later tragedy of that marriage antecedent circumstance had much to do.

The verses of *Victor and Cazire* display obviously enough the influence of the German Gothic school domesticated by Scott and Monk Lewis. In "Revenge" the ghost of the injured Conrad snatches the fair Agnes from the arms of her Adolphus. In "Ghastia; or, The Avenging Demon!!!" with its initial plagiarism from Chatterton, amid tumults of the tempest a Warrior and a Stranger and a Phantom engage in a somewhat obscure colloquy which concludes with the phantom being hurried back to hell and the warrior expiring at the

command of the stranger who bears a burning cross upon his forehead; evidently he is the Wandering Jew. This is the poem's sole interest. The story of the Wandering Jew intrigued Shelley and its influence is to be traced not only in the poem of that name but in *Queen Mab*. But before pursuing this theme I would say a word about one other poem, "The Irishman's Song," of the *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*.

' Mr. Garnett has suggested that in one respect at least Shelley's home influences were fortunate in that his father being a devout Whig and accepting the political guidance of the Duke of Norfolk, Shelley must early have sympathized with the wrongs of Ireland. The Catholic Emancipation act though long in realization was early agitated. Whatever the source of his views, Shelley's poem in *Victor and Cazire* entitled "The Irishman's Song" exhibits a sympathy with the dead heroes of Ireland whose "yelling ghosts ride on the blast" crying, "my countrymen! vengeance!" The poetical merits of the piece are about equal to those of many of Tom Moore's *Irish Melodies* and somewhat below the average of the *Hebrew Melodies* of Byron. It is a competent enough piece of verse in a style now obsolete, but its sentiment is commendable. Shelley's first political foray, that into Ireland in February, 1812, had, it is clear, its emotional antecedents and was not the sudden whim of a fantastic young man of irrational impulses.

The *Wandering Jew* was composed at about the same time as the poems of *Victor and Cazire*, 1809-1810. The history and authorship of the poem are somewhat obscured by the fact that it was not published until after Shelley's death, first in 1829 in *The Edinburgh Literary Journal* and, in 1831, in *Fraser's Magazine*, the two versions differing considerably. Thomas Medwin, Shelley's cousin, claimed a share in its composition but how great was this share and extending to what parts of the poem does not appear. The point is of no particular importance, because the poem has slight literary value. Its theme and some of the ideas are, however, if Shelley's, of some significance in tracing the history of his mind.

The four cantos of the poem, as published, open with an extensive and largely irrelevant passage of nature description imitative of Walter Scott. We detach ourselves from this scene and the pensive reflections which it excites to pursue a horseman—

And as his steed impetuous flies,  
What strange fire flashes from his eyes!

Study of the *Wandering Jew*

The convent's vesper bell stirs the mysterious stranger to tears. He enters the convent, listens to the service, and witnesses four nuns bearing to the altar "a fainting novice" manifestly reluctant to take the vows. She, before the fatal words are uttered, dashes into the crowd, is rescued, fainting, by the mysterious stranger and borne away into the storm. When Rosa, no less, recovers her senses she engages with Paulo, her rescuer, in a dialogue in which he swears eternal fidelity and she is—

By turns with fear and love possessed.

The second canto takes up the story of Victorio, of noble lineage, the friend of Paulo, wending his way to the lonely castle of the latter which is even more gloomy and Gothic than that of Udolpho. We then abruptly resume the story of Paulo, now united with Rosa and soothed somewhat in his mysterious and satanic torments by her ministrations. With her he engages in philosophic converse and shares the melancholy of her song. Moved to confession by the "oppressive reflections" stirred by her singing, Paulo announces he has a "secret to unfold" and summons Rosa and Victorio (obscurely present, for he has not to our knowledge yet appeared) to a wild scene appropriate to that purpose.

In Canto III we have the confession. Paulo, it appears, is the Wandering Jew. He recites his fatal mockery of the dying Savior and his sentence to remain alive on earth until Christ's second coming. Nature is horridly convulsed at this act. Paulo lies entranced but dreams of Christ's ascent to bliss and then of the horrors of hell. Awakening, he seeks to kill himself but always vainly. He is doomed to exist "Till time shall be no more." He yet pierces—

. . . with intellectual eye,  
Into each hidden mystery.

He knows all the secrets of nature. The past, present, and future pass in review before him. He can even summon the Prince of Hell—

Awed by the Cross upon my head.

He proceeds to recount various incidents of his tragic life but withholds the worst, horrors—

Such as might blast a demon's ear.

The fourth canto laments that man, who should be "Creation's

ornament," forgets the source of his blessings. We turn then to Victorio, now, it appears, consumed with jealousy of Paulo for—

"Rosa is Paulo's eternally."

A long passage descriptive of nature in her darker aspects prepares for the entrance of the Witch of whom Victorio begs "that secret power" to secure Rosa to him. The Witch obligingly pursues her incantations and evokes an "awful being"—

Satan—a shadeless, hideous beast—  
In all his horrors stood confessed!

Satan produces a "potent drug" and Victorio departs with a casket containing the philtre. This presumably is administered, for Rosa dies and Paulo laments his inability to follow her!

As thus he spoke grew dark the sky,  
Hoarse thunders murmured awfully,  
"O Demon! I am thine!" he cried.  
A hollow fiendish voice replied,  
"Come! for thy doom is misery."

The interest of this production lies not in the conventional Gothic stage effects but in certain resemblances to, and in yet more important differences from, similar themes in Shelley's later work. Ahasuerus in *Queen Mab*, likewise doomed by the Almighty to eternal life on earth, is not crushed. He, in his soul, is superior to the God of evil who condemns him. Nor is the Christ of *Queen Mab* the conventional figure of tradition but the earthly manifestation of divine malice, a hypocritical God. Both poems under discussion are youthful works and the gap in time between them, two years possibly, is small. Philosophically, intellectually, the gap is enormous. In the *Wandering Jew* there is little promise of that unconventional vigor and originality evident in *Queen Mab*. Shelley, it is manifest, matured intellectually very fast.

'One or two juvenilia of the years 1809 and 1810, unremarkable as poetry, yet indicate that even at so early a date, Shelley was pre-occupied with his lifelong detestation of tyranny. In "A Dialogue" (1809) occur the phrases "Tyranny's nod," "Phantoms of Prejudice," "Bigotry's bloodhounds." In "To Death," composed it is true in Oxford, but in the year 1810, is considerable rhetorical eloquence of the *Queen Mab* order. "Nations groan that kings may bask in bliss." Ambition, Pride, Tyrants, courtiers are the theme of his de-



nunciation, and the "war-fiend riots o'er a peaceful land." "Bigotry's Victim" (1809) contains the lines—

For in vain from the grasp of the Bigot I flee;  
The most tenderly loved of my soul  
Are slaves to his hated control.

In the years 1809-1810, because presumably of the alienation of his cousin Harriet and of whatever reading he did in radical literature, the works of William Godwin or others, Shelley became aware of social evils in the larger more impersonal sense, and affirmed his purpose to war ceaselessly upon them. Then or thereabouts he became a dedicated spirit. The indifference, the carelessness, with which he concluded the second of his novels, *St. Irvyne*, reveals the fact that the Gothic romances which had so absorbed him had lost much of their influence. Of this romance and of its predecessor *Zastrozzi* it is, however, necessary to say a word.

*Zastrozzi*, the first of Shelley's two Gothic romances, an imitation of the *Zofloya* of "Rosa Matilda," who was Charlotte Dacre, Mrs. Byron, is no more than is to be expected from the boy of seventeen steeped in the blood and thunder tales he so admired. It is a gifted boy, to be sure, and the story though wild and not wholly coherent is literate. Perhaps a summary will be not unamusing to readers curious as to this work. It is difficult to believe that any one ever again, save as a professional requirement, will read the book in its entirety.

The unfortunate hero of the piece, one Verezzi, is thus introduced:

"Torn from the society of all he held dear on earth, the victim of secret enemies, and exiled from happiness, was the wretched Verezzi!

"All was quiet, a pitchy darkness involved the face of things, when, urged by fiercest revenge, *Zastrozzi* placed himself at the door of the inn where, undisturbed, Verezzi slept."

*Zastrozzi* transports his enemy to a cave and chains him in darkness. A landslide almost destroys him but he is found and nursed back to life, for it seems that, though tortured, he must for some unknown reason be kept alive. Convalescent, Verezzi escapes, *Zastrozzi* in pursuit; comes to the castle of Matilda who, we learn, is enamored of Verezzi and hates her rival in his affections, the Countess Julia. About to drown herself in desperation, Matilda is rescued by Verezzi, woos him and informs him falsely that Julia is dead. Whereupon Verezzi experiences a series of sinking spells from which he unfortunately recovers, marries Matilda, and removes with her to Venice. Confronted by the much alive Julia, Verezzi kills himself, and Matilda kills Julia. Matilda

is summoned by the Inquisition and repents. Zastrozzi, who was the nigger in the woodpile all along and responsible for these events, comes also before the tribunal. "A smile of contemptuous atheism played over his features." He confesses his fiendish crimes, whose incentive, it appears, was the betrayal by Verezzi's father of Zastrozzi's mother. Zastrozzi dies defiant on the rack, "with a wild convulsive laugh of exulting revenge." This work was published in April, 1810, by a sanguine publisher who is supposed to have paid the author £40 for it, a legend hard to credit.

In justice to the youthful Shelley it should be observed that he evidently undertook the composition of this work as a lark. It is commonly said that he had no sense of humor, but *Zastrozzi* to some extent disproves the charge. In adolescence he was capable of high spirits, of vivacity, and though humor was not, truly, his strong point, he was not wholly lacking therein. The personal misfortunes he so soon encountered and his passionate sense of social injustice, which considerably provoked them, checked whatever propensity to humor he had in youth. Great religious reformers and great social reformers are seldom notable for humor. They are characterized by their enemies as fanatics; they fail to get the world in true perspective. They exaggerate trifles and make fools of themselves, becoming, thus, food for humor in others. Such was to be Shelley's development and in the course of it the springs of humor dried in him. Nevertheless, while he wrote I believe he thought *Zastrozzi* a funny book and perhaps even funnier, *St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian*, a second work similar in kind and a product of the same period. *St. Irvyne* by "A Gentleman of the University of Oxford," was published early in December, 1810.

I do not recall that any one has pointed out the close resemblance of the initial scene of *St. Irvyne* to the scene in *Manfred* in which the gloomy hero of that poem is about to hurl himself from the precipice. Wolfstein of *St. Irvyne*, his melancholy counterpart, introduced to us amid a terrific Alpine storm, vainly invokes the lightning to end his sufferings, and is about to leap into the abyss but, unable "to sustain the unequal contest . . . sank to the earth . . . entranced in total insensibility." Rescued by monks only to be captured immediately by bandits, Wolfstein, who surely was *Manfred's* sire, confronts the bandit chieftain thus: "'Bandit!' he answered fearlessly, 'I have none, —no money—no hope—no friends; nor do I care for existence! Now judge if such a man be a fit victim for fear! No! I never trembled!'" The bandit chieftain, enraptured by such dauntless courage, enrolls Wolfstein in his band. Thereupon ensues a fantasia of murders,

Gothic ruins, violent and inexplicable emotions, and the dark horrors of Rosicrucian mysteries which are not without their entertaining moments. The reader, nevertheless, is not ungrateful to the author for passing without apology and explanation from Chapter IV to VII. The ending, which involves most of the characters in violent death, justifiably perplexed the publisher, whom the author deigned thus to enlighten:

"Ginotti, as you will see, did *not* die by Wolfstein's hand, but by the influence of that natural magic which, when the secret was imparted to the latter, destroyed him. Mountfort being a character of inferior import, I did not think it necessary to state the catastrophe of *him*, as at best it could be but uninteresting. Eloise and Fitzeustace are married and happy, I suppose, and Megalena dies by the same means as Wolfstein. I do not myself see any other explanation that is required."

Yet five days later he adds this further note to the mystified publisher, suggesting that he had himself been enlightened by a re-perusal of his work:

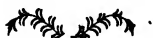
"What I mean as 'Rosicrucian' is the elixir of eternal life which Ginotti has obtained. Mr. Godwin's romance of 'St. Leon,' turns upon that superstition; I enveloped it in mystery for the greater excitement of interest, for on a reëxamination, you will perceive that Mountfort physically did kill Ginotti, which must appear from the latter's paleness."

On the evidence, what is predictable of the boy just turned eighteen who entered Oxford in the autumn of 1810? He is, first of all, a rebellious, contumacious of authority whether paternal or academic. The natural affections of home life have been weakened by the stupidities of his parents. His cousin, whom he has loved, and his sisters have been taught to shun and distrust him for his disobedience and his dangerous beliefs. He is an intellectual boy, precocious, and sensible of powers greater than most. What direction these are to take he does not yet know, though he aspires to authorship. The evidences of his talents as a writer are not such as to promise more than mediocrity in verse. In prose his skill is greater, but he is not endowed with a talent for fiction. His essays in that field are purely imitative. They are absurd and he is humorously aware of their absurdity. Yet they display a deep and true interest in the occult. Science attracts him because it opens to him a way into the unknown more fascinating than that of the alchemists. The philosopher's stone, if found, will be discovered by the new magic of chemistry and electricity. Science is to give to man

mastery of his world. It is the triumph of reason, and reason is to enfranchise man, liberate him from the bigotry of the past. Beyond his passion for science is a humanitarian passion for the improvement of society. Science is to that end a means, and, the end achieved, its pursuit a recreation and a reward. Of Shelley's three interests, literature, science, and reform, the last is chief. (

## CHAPTER II

### *A Heretic at Oxford*



WITH the autumn of 1810 and Shelley's entrance into Oxford, the documentary evidence as to his interests and beliefs, both in letters and published works of verse and prose, rapidly augments. So, too, unfortunately, does the cloud of unreliable or lying witnesses, among whom Thomas Jefferson Hogg must hold the chief place. Few great men have been so unfortunate as Shelley both in his friends and his biographers! The earliest pictures of him given to the world, both in his lifetime and in the decades immediately after, when he first became of public interest, falsified him almost out of recognition. A scandal interest early attached itself to him and has been important ever since. M. Maurois exploits it in so complete a misrepresentation of the poet as *Ariel*. Seemingly, such is the kind of characterization of the poet that the public wants. It is, then, more profitable so to present him than to endeavor to depict him in a less exciting and more accurate fashion. Shelley was an unusual person and stirred various emotions in the breasts of his acquaintances, emotions of extreme devotion or hatred, of incredulity or amusement. That few understood him is due to a rather simple cause. They could not credit in him his disinterested devotion to ideas and causes. He was fallible enough, but at the heart of him was a great, a passionate concern for impersonal ends. Few human beings understand an abstract devotion or can credit one who professes it. Such a one is characterized as a madman, an Utopian dreamer, or a poetic visionary. He is a likely theme upon which to spin humorous fables.

Hogg's case it is well to look into at the outset, for Hogg is the chief witness for the Oxford year, and though his mendacity has been repeatedly revealed, yet the picture of Shelley he has drawn has become the one best known and one not easily erased. From the evidence it is possible to guess the motives for Hogg's perversions of the truth and, thus forewarned, accept of his account only what is intrinsically probable or is substantiated by other evidence. The insidious falsity of Hogg's characterization is due to the fact that there is usually a basis of truth for his worst fictions but this has been so distorted as to be more misleading than sheer fabrication. What is the reason for this misrepresentation by one who professed

to be the poet's friend and to whom were entrusted by Lady Shelley the materials for the unfinished life, materials so misused that they were withdrawn upon publication of the two volumes Hogg has left us? The reason is not far to seek.

Hogg, who made Shelley's acquaintance in the autumn of 1810 and who was expelled with Shelley from Oxford the spring following, was, seemingly, genuinely attracted to Shelley, who exerted a fascination upon men so diverse as Peacock, Trelawny, and Byron. But beyond certain bookish and literary interests the two had little in common. Hogg was a worldly sensual young man, at heart incapable of generous enthusiasms. When, after Shelley's elopement in 1811, Harriet was left unprotected in York while Shelley returned to London, Hogg endeavored to seduce her. Shelley, learning of this, broke with Hogg. Certain letters were exchanged but Shelley was unconvinced that Hogg was genuinely penitent for his treachery. Subsequently in London the friendship was nominally renewed but, despite Hogg's assumption in the *Life* of complete intimacy, the relationship was never profound. Nor indeed had it ever been so profound as Hogg pretended. Shelley had always made his reservations, had been aware that his friend was cold to those interests which he had most at heart. Hogg, I believe, resented this fact even in the Oxford days and in the *Life* pretended to a knowledge of Shelley's affairs which he did not have. Then followed the breach due to Hogg's treachery and, in subsequent years, Shelley's growing fame. Not least was Hogg's later alliance with a woman who had greatly admired Shelley, perhaps loved him, Jane Williams.

Pretty materials these for a study in the ways of the human heart. The conclusion is by inference, but plausible inference surely. Hogg had cut no great figure in the world; his chief fame was that, for a time, he had been associated with a young man, since celebrated, on whom he had looked down with the smiling tolerance of a child of this world for one of the children of light. That amused condescension is the note of Hogg's memories of his "friend." It becomes a conscious pose, a pose sustained through two volumes. It is born of envy and rancor, of the sense of insufficiency in himself, of betrayal of friendship. The letters of Shelley to him upon the occasion of the breach in their friendship Hogg, it is believed, deliberately falsified. It was a hard situation. To be honest he must betray a black episode in his life. Nevertheless he did not refuse the commission to write the life, which was the honorable course to pursue. He falsified the letters—with subsequent inevitable detection. But, more, he systemati-

cally set himself to paint of his erstwhile friend the picture of a gifted fool. To this irresponsible creature he himself is always smilingly paternal, tolerant, helpful, superior in worldly wisdom and understanding. He was partly successful in his falsification, but now that some of his deceptions are proved we may be suspicious of others.

What, then, of Hogg's account is to be credited? It is a hard question. Always, I think, we should discredit that which makes Shelley seem irresponsible and insincere, all that makes him seem futile and crack-brained. It is a matter largely of interpretation. Hogg did not resort to sheer invention. His was the more subtle, the calculated art, of distortion and misrepresentation. That Hogg could remember detailed conversations and minute incidents such as he records after the passage of thirty years is obviously impossible. He is painting a portrait in a certain style. There is a basis in fact. If the fact is corroborated from other sources we may believe it; but even so Hogg's interpretation of the fact is wholly suspect.

We begin, then, with Hogg's circumstantial account of his first meeting with Shelley early in their Oxford residence. He describes the poet's rooms with their litter of books and chemical apparatus. Burns and stains had already wrought havoc with the furnishings. If ever this description was true of Shelley's rooms it was surely not true of Hogg's first visit to them. As Denis MacCarthy has pointed out, such devastation could not be brought about in so short a time; Shelley had been resident in Oxford but a few days. It is credible enough that Shelley had some quantity of chemical and electrical apparatus which, in the period of their relationship, considerably annoyed and frightened Hogg, to whom Shelley's scientific obsession was but evidence of his madness. Hogg himself was wholly literary in his interests. He knew nothing of science and apparently thought it all nonsense.

Hogg's method in presenting facts in such a way as to make Shelley seem a fool and pure visionary is apparent in his highly circumstantial account of Shelley's scientific dreams.<sup>1</sup> Here, it seems, he felt no need of distortion, for Shelley's speculations as to the future of science and its possibilities in the service of man, were in themselves to Hogg sufficient evidence of the poet's impractical and visionary nature.<sup>2</sup> Hogg was unaware that Shelley was but quoting or expanding, with justifiable enlargements, upon the speculations of scientists. Hogg was unfamiliar with Erasmus Darwin. Dirigibles and airplanes, the industrial uses of electricity—all these to Hogg were laughable fancies. Unfortunately for Hogg, the developments of a century have

proved Shelley and Darwin to be prophets rather than crack-brained visionaries. What Hogg cited as proof of an absurd credulity is evidence merely of Shelley's current scientific knowledge and the prophetic character of his imagination.

Hogg's report of Shelley's scientific forecast is told as though it occurred on a particular evening. It is improbable that Hogg recalled any extensive conversation so fully. But that it is the résumé of various conversations of like import is probable enough. It is not the kind of thing that Hogg, in his ignorance of science, could invent, for it has to do with chemistry and electricity. Chemistry, Shelley declared, was the only science worth studying. By its means and that of electricity Africa would become a land of plenty. Presumably Shelley had in mind here some project for irrigating the Sahara. Heat, also, produced by scientific means, was to modify climate, or at any rate "Supersede our costly and inconvenient fuel, and . . . suffice to warm our habitations, for culinary purposes and for the various demands for the mechanical arts." Electricity was to be drawn from heaven by electrical kites. "The galvanic battery is a new engine . . . what will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates, effect?" Shelley spoke also of the developments possible in the balloon and its use as an instrument in the exploration of Africa. "The shadow of the first balloon, which a vertical sun would project precisely underneath it, as it glided silently over that hitherto unhappy country, would virtually emancipate every slave, and would annihilate slavery for ever."

That last sentence is authentic Shelley. There was in him little care for what we nowadays call "pure science." Great as was his scientific interest, it can be explained on other grounds than that of a disinterested desire for knowledge. Scientific facts and the philosophy of science were important to him in the formulation of his scheme of the universe, in the explanation of matter and force. But more, he foresaw in science the means to the alleviation of human ignorance and misery! When, later, he was to write *Prometheus Unbound* he spoke of science shaking the throne of Jupiter—the fortress that is of inherited evil and tyranny—though not sufficiently to overthrow it. And again, in a liberated world, science has been made the tool of emancipated man in refashioning the universe. It is this larger, this social interest, I believe, which prevented Shelley from devoting his life to science; his dedication to the work of reform is evident in the conversations which Hogg reports;



Hogg emphasizes, also, Shelley's early interest in metaphysics and here, too, other evidence supports the accuracy of Hogg's report. Metaphysics he characterized as "a noble study indeed . . . he paced the room, with prodigious strides, and discoursed of souls . . . a future state . . . of preëxistence." How and when Shelley became acquainted with the Platonic doctrine of preëxistence is unsure. If it was in the works of Albertus Magnus, the time was, rather loosely, the Eton years. Hogg reports several anecdotes which, if in germ authentic, suggest that the Platonic philosophy was already at war in Shelley with the eighteenth-century sceptics and rationalists, Hume, Holbach, and the rest. In one instance he is said to have remarked of a bright-looking gypsy child, "How much intellect is here . . . and what an unworthy occupation for a person who once knew perfectly the whole circle of the sciences; who has forgotten them all, it is true, but who would certainly recollect them, although most probably she will never do so; will never recall a single principle of any of them." And again of a babe in arms whose mother he astounded by demanding, "Will your baby tell us anything about preëxistence, Madam?" This last I take to be an instance of Shelley's humor wilfully perverted by Hogg to fantastic seriousness. Hogg is authority for the statement that he and Shelley while at Oxford read Plato, but in an English version of Dacier's translation; also that they read some of Thomas Taylor's translations of the neo-Platonists, which ones, unfortunately, are not specified.

Before resuming with the evidence from Shelley's letters of his preoccupation while at Oxford with religious doubts, a mental conflict which led to the publication of *The Necessity of Atheism*, what may we say, on the evidence, was Shelley's state of mind, his intellectual prepossessions when he wrestled with the sceptics, Hume and the rest, while at Oxford? Of his strong scientific and humanitarian interests there can be no question.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, too, if Hogg is to be credited, he was already interested in Platonic idealism and in the mysticism of the neo-Platonists, the antithesis, metaphysically, of the material-minded revolutionary philosophers who preceded, and whose thought is largely summarized in, William Godwin.<sup>2</sup> The ingredients of Shelley's philosophy are thus early indicated: science, materialism, humanitarianism, idealism, and mysticism.<sup>3</sup> To extract from these diverse and contradictory elements a stable and consistent belief was a task for a high order of intelligence. Shelley, naturally enough, did not at once succeed. His work in verse and prose is the history of his efforts and ultimate success. It is the task of this book

to pursue the written record and trace the stages of his philosophic progress.

In a letter of November 11, 1810, Shelley asks Stockdale, his publisher, to obtain for him a certain Hebrew essay "demonstrating that the Christian religion is false"; and a week later asks that a copy of Godwin's *Political Justice* be sent him, a work which he had presumably read at Eton. His principles were the subject of family concern, for the publisher, Stockdale, had warned Timothy Shelley of his son's heresies, and in the Christmas holidays there were ructions. "My father," Shelley writes Hogg, "wished to withdraw me from college; I would not consent to it." And in the same letter: "O! I burn with impatience for the moment of the dissolution of intolerance; it has injured me." The context makes evident that the allusion is to the breaking of his engagement to his cousin Harriet Grove because of his unorthodox beliefs. It was an experience that left a permanent mark, one that made him soon a rebel to the world, to its institutions both political and religious, its bigotry and its cowardly fear of conventions. Early he was to learn in suffering what he taught in song.

"I shall not read Bishop Prettyman," he remarks in the same letter (December 20, 1810), "or any more of them, unless I have some particular reason. Bigots will not argue; it destroys the very nature of the thing to argue; it is contrary to *faith*." It is an incoherent letter crammed with the matter which was in his heart. From Bishop Prettyman he turns abruptly to love, declaring that "in this alone is subordination necessary." Then he is off on a theme more important to him than love: "*Man* is equal, and I am convinced that equality will be the attendant on a more advanced and ameliorated state of society." He concludes: "Adieu! Down with Bigotry! Down with intolerance! In this endeavour your most sincere friend will join his every power, his every feeble resource." It is unlikely that Shelley at this stage of his development was wholly unhappy despite his disappointments. He is too enthusiastic, too bent upon reforming the world, too intoxicated with his own enthusiasm to be hopeless. Though love were lost for a time, was there not the whole world to be converted to sanity and tolerance through the instrumentality of reason?

Shelley wrote a number of letters to Hogg during the Christmas holidays. These have mostly to do with the breaking of his engagement to Harriet Grove and the hopelessness of effecting a reconciliation. Of his own family apparently his sister Elizabeth was the only one to defend his cause and she ineffectually. There are passages,

however, of wider interest: the social implications of his misfortunes which, characteristically, he stresses. Incidentally he speaks also of "the designs of the Author of our nature." Shelley was not yet prepared to argue the nonexistence of the deity. He was no more than sceptical. "You have said," he addresses Hogg, "that the philosophy which I pursued is not uncongenial with the strictest morality; you must see that it militates with the received opinions of the world; what, therefore, does it offend; but prejudice and superstition, that superstitious bigotry, inspired by the system upon which at present the world acts, of believing all that we are told as incontrovertible facts?"

The letter of January 3, 1811, is particularly interesting as revealing the chaotic nature of Shelley's speculations and beliefs at this important moment of his history. He begins without preliminary: "Before we deny or believe the existence of anything, it is necessary that we should have a tolerably clear idea of what it is. The word 'God,' a vague word, has been and will continue to be, the source of numberless errors.... Does it not imply 'the soul of the universe, the intelligent and *necessarily* beneficent, actuating principle.' This it is impossible not to believe in; I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are, in themselves, arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced, that some vast intellect animates infinity. If we disbelieve *this*, the strongest argument in support of the existence of a future state instantly becomes annihilated. I confess that I think Pope's

'All are but parts of one stupendous whole,'

something more than poetry. It has ever been my favourite theory, for the immoral [?immortal] soul, 'never to be able to die, never to escape from some shrine as chilling as the clay-formed dungeon, which now it inhabits'; it is the future punishment which I can most easily believe in." The somewhat ambiguous meaning of this passage is further confused by that which follows: "Love, love *infinite in extent*, eternal in duration, yet (allowing your theory in that point) perfectible, should be the reward; but can we suppose that this reward will arise, spontaneously, as a necessary appendage to our nature, or that our nature itself could be without cause—a first cause—a God? When do we see effects arise without causes? What causes are there without corresponding effects?" This is the raw stuff of debate and with no certain conclusion. He continues with an anathema upon Bigotry, declares he has "slept with a loaded pistol and some

poison, last night, but did not die" and concludes with a wholly contradictory doubt as to the immortality in which he had previously expressed belief: "But can the dead feel; dawns any day-beam on the night of dissolution?"

This small but important group of letters of the holiday season of 1810-1811 is curiously mixed of love and theology. It is hard for the modern reader to concern himself greatly with Shelley's lamentations and despair for love frustrated. Perhaps were the letters addressed to Harriet Grove herself or did they, to his confidant, recount the episodes of courtship and dismissal they would possess some story value. As they did not, it is easy to belittle their emotional significance. I have before suggested that Shelley's marriage to Harriet Westbrook is more explicable in the light of this disappointment. It was emotionally a low ebb tide which bore him and Harriet out to a sea deceptively calm. Intellectually the rebuff to self-love, the thwarted passion, besides stirring in him a violent hatred of bigotry and a scorn of hollow conventions, drew him to larger issues. It is evidence of Shelley's genuinely intellectual nature, even at so early an age, that for an emotional wound he instinctively sought healing in philosophy and theology. A world that can hurt so much as this asked of the questing mind some explanation, some definition of the deity responsible for it, if indeed such a deity exists. Hence the value of the passages which reveal a powerful though adolescent mind seeking to put its intellectual world in order, to justify the ways of Divinity to itself.

In his letter to Hogg of January 6, in evident answer to some dissent of his correspondent, Shelley returns to the argument as to the existence and nature of God: "I will consider your argument against the Non-existence of a Deity. Do you allow that some *supernatural* power actuates the organization of physical causes? It is evident so far as this, that if *power* and *wisdom* are employed in the continual arrangement of these affairs, that this power, etc., is something out of the comprehension of man, as he now exists; at least if we allow that the soul is *not* matter." He then goes on to argue the antecedents of this actuating power whose ultimate cause must be a Deity, who is the "soul of the Universe" analogous to the soul of man's body. "Why *too* is *not* gravitation the soul of a clock?" It is so as essentially as "animation is that of an oyster. I think we may not inaptly define *Soul* as the most supreme, superior, and distinguished abstract appendage to the nature of anything." The deity against whose existence he had seemingly argued must then be merely the

God of revealed religion, the God in whose image man is presumably made. Shelley appears to be at this time neither atheist nor truly agnostic. He seems to accept a Deity unknowable except in its manifestations, a soul of the universe. It is debatable whether Shelley's position is that of a deist or a pantheist. He is, evidently, not clear in his own mind. We should anticipate, then, in his subsequent clarification of his ideas, a more definitely deistical or pantheistical trend and a better grasp of the distinction between the two.

The effect of Shelley's perplexities upon his unsympathetic parents when he endeavored to clarify his mind by arguing his doubts is set forth in these words: "I attempted to enlighten my father, *mirabile dictu!* He for a time listened to my arguments; he allowed the impossibility (considered abstractedly) of any preternatural interferences by Providence. He allowed the utter incredibility of witches, ghosts, legendary miracles. But when I came to *apply* the truths, on which we had agreed so harmoniously, he started at the bare idea of some facts generally believed never having existed, and silenced me with an Equine argument, in effect with these words: 'I believe because I do believe.'" And his mother, he adds, "imagines me to be in the high road to Pandemonium, she fancies I want to make a deistical coterie of all my little sisters: how laughable." Nevertheless, if Mrs. Shelley abhorred deism, there was justification for her fears. She would have been less observant than we can believe had she not discerned in her first-born an irrepressible impulse to impart his views to everyone. His childish desire to adopt a child to bring up, his efforts to shape the mind of Harriet Westbrook, his practical attempts in political reform and the propaganda of his writings both in prose and verse attest Shelley's life-long, his all-absorbing, passion to enlighten and improve the world. To such as he the education of all who dwell in darkness is a moral imperative. So reformers are constituted, and Shelley was first and always a reformer.

The letter of January 12, melancholy in tone because of his loneliness within his own family and the alienation of the one sister on whose support he had counted, turns in his customary manner to problems less personal. "What necessity is there for continuing in existence? But Heaven! Eternity! Love! My dear friend, I am yet a sceptic on these subjects; would that I could believe them to be, as they are represented; would that I could totally disbelieve them!" Yet a few lines later he protests: "I here take God (and a God exists) to witness," etc.... And in the immediate context he continues, "I wish, ardently wish, to be profoundly convinced of the existence of

a Deity, that so superior a spirit might derive some degree of happiness from my feeble exertions; for love is heaven, and heaven is love. You think so, too, and you disbelieve not the existence of an eternal, omnipresent spirit." He proceeds then to an argument with a supposititious materialist who contends that the Universe came by chance: "I will answer in the words of Spinoza." He then argues a first cause which must be a Deity. "Now nothing remains but to prove this Deity has a care, or rather that its only employment consists in regulating the present and future happiness of its creation. Our ideas of infinite space, etc., are scarcely to be called ideas, for we cannot either comprehend or explain them. Therefore the Deity must be judged by us from attributes analogical to our situation. Oh, that this Deity were the soul of the universe, the spirit of universal, imperishable love! Indeed I believe it is: but now to your argument of the necessity of Christianity. I am not sure that your argument does not tend to prove its unreality." He goes on to assert hopefully that fanaticism is decaying and speaks of "hideous, hated traits of Superstition." Christianity as practiced was evidently identifiable with this monster. The last letter from which I shall quote in this connection alludes to some unknown correspondent, W—, to whom he has "attempted to prove, from the *existence* of a Deity and a Revelation, the futility of the superstition upon which he founds his whole scheme."

Two letters written after his return to Oxford by Shelley to his father are of considerable interest as indicating the rationalistic character of the arguments with which he controverted revealed religion. The crux was the supernaturalism of the accepted institutional Christianity. The testimony of the twelve Apostles was insufficient to convince him of the violation of natural law. "We cannot, if we *consider* it, believe facts inconsistent with the general laws of Nature, that there is no evidence sufficient, or rather that evidence is insufficient to prove such facts." The letter has other points of interest, but it suffices to quote the reason which made it essential for him that he adopt such private sentiments as he professed: "'Religion fetters a reasoning mind with the very bonds which restrain the unthinking one from mischief.' " A week later he writes again to his father declaring that on the examinations "which are all on the principle of Inquisitorial Orthodoxy, with respect to matters of belief I shall perfectly coincide with the opinions of the learned Doctors, although by the very rules of reasoning which their own *systems* of logic teach me I *could* refute their errors. I shall not therefore publicly

come under the act 'De heretico comburendo.'" This, I take it, was considerably a concession to his father, whose concern throughout was with the public profession of heresy, of conflict with authority. The son apparently at this date, February 17, 1811, was willing to avoid conflict, and outwardly to conform, as required by the regulations, to orthodox requirements. And with this, presumably, Timothy Shelley was content. It was the publicity excited by *The Necessity of Atheism* and the resultant expulsion which caused the final breach between father and son. Propriety, convention, outer conformity were the ruling principles of the father. To these, even in the wish to propitiate his parent, the son could not sufficiently conform.

In a passage already quoted Shelley alludes with seeming knowledge to Spinoza. Some reading in Plato and the neo-Platonists is likewise referable to the Oxford year. Hogg also mentions reading with his friend Hume's *Essays*, Locke on *The Human Understanding*, and Holbach's *La Système de la Nature*. These are but instances, evidently, of Shelley's study at this period. That they fostered his scepticism and contributed to the purpose of *The Necessity of Atheism* is probable enough. They supplied the means to that destruction of inherited beliefs necessarily precedent to the erection of a new philosophy of life. What he retained of the old and the use he made of it is revealed in the succession of his letters and published works yet to be considered.

It is needful, perhaps, to stress at the outset the thoroughness of Shelley's study, the breadth of his reading. It was no love of destruction, no adolescent arrogance which led him to scepticism and denial of accepted beliefs and thence to the laborious and painful synthesis of a new faith. He wished, as his letters show, to believe, if not in the traditional God of orthodox Christians then in a better God, a God of love.<sup>1</sup> The orthodox and smug ascribe to youth of Shelley's type a wanton pleasure in heresy.<sup>1</sup> Shelley was rebel and heretic of inner necessity, of the unquenchable desire to rationalize his own deepest needs. It was his task to fit together all that he must accept in the light of reason and all else that deeper intuition prompted him to believe.<sup>1</sup> He must, then, learn as much as possible of all philosophies, all religions, ignore nothing in man's knowledge of the world and himself which could contribute to his understanding of the purpose—if purpose there was—in being. It was a pretentious, an almost impossible task, but Shelley made an astonishing onslaught upon it. He was precocious and became early an inveterate reader.

All the evidence we have, and it is sufficient and varied, shows him to have read with complete absorption and for hours on end. He had a remarkable memory and acquired languages easily. The allusions in his letters to his reading become in his later years extraordinary in their range. Nor was it light reading. Shelley wished to know the classics in Latin and Greek and the best part of the literature and philosophy of western Europe. He aspired, in Arnold's dictum, to knowledge of the best that has been thought and known in the world. And to an astounding degree he succeeded. He must at the time of his death have been, for his years, one of the best-read men in Europe; and this knowledge he acquired was no mere erudition hoarded and shut from the light of day, but food for his thought and his verse.

This is an obvious fact, but like many obvious facts in Shelley's life, it is too often ignored. 'The Shelley of popular fancy is dreamy, erratic, wild-eyed, devoted to love affairs, verse making, and ill-considered denunciations of the established order.' Nor does Shelley fit the popular misconception of the scholar as one secluded, futile, out of touch with life. He was most of all concerned with the evils from which man suffers, political and social evils, and the evils of individual selfishness. Whence did these arise? How are they to be remedied? It is with these questions that Shelley was concerned and therefore he wished to know what all the best minds of the world had to say on these subjects. Shelley was impatient of the past, with its evil and its errors; but the torch bearers of hope, the poets, scientists, and philosophers from Plato to Humphry Davy and Sir William Drummond were his incessant study. It was these men who lighted the darkness of man's past and were an augury of a brighter future. Few great poets can have been so intellectual, so scholarly, as Shelley. Wordsworth was content with few books. Feeling and intuition sufficed him. The inconsistencies and ultimate degradation of his thought are a natural consequence. There was no conscious effort made by Wordsworth to develop and to integrate the various powers of the mind. Therefore as his sensitiveness to sensation and his emotional response thereto grow less delicate with advancing years he becomes less the great poet. In Shelley to the time of his death there is undeviating growth and increasing poetic power. True he died at thirty, and at a later time his growth might have been arrested, his powers have decayed. Yet such a falling off was in his case less likely than in Wordsworth's for the reason which has been advanced that his mind fed incessantly upon the recorded thought



of man. He is one of the finest instances to prove that knowledge, erudition even, is not destructive of the creative, the poetic power, but contributory thereto.<sup>1</sup>

Though Shelley in *The Necessity of Atheism* provoked the lightning it is evident that such was not his intention. A strain of youthful bravado may have colored his purpose but in the main he was genuinely desirous of an answer to his doubts. It was his custom under a pseudonym to debate with various unknown correspondents points scientific and philosophical. It was his wish to elicit the best possible defense of the Christian deity and by sending his little tract to various bishops and college heads he thought to attain this end. Instead he provoked the University authorities to expel him. Much posthumous ridicule has been heaped on the college authorities for this action, but indeed they acted as college authorities usually act whenever bumptious undergraduates express unpopular opinions. At the present writing (1935) undergraduates are in some American universities expelled for a too vociferous advocacy of Communism. Were Communism the prevailing political creed, naturally no objection would be made to its support. College authorities wish to be let alone, to pursue their quiet lives unmolested by precocious youngsters who make nuisances of themselves. That these young people are often animated by a sincere purpose and a desire to learn does not apparently occur to those whose job it is to educate. As to the police, so to the college officials, for their charges to question, to demand open debate upon, matters of political or social controversy, is to reveal a froward nature, a recalcitrant spirit. It is thought improper for the young to reason why. The themes of heresy have in our day shifted from the religious to the political field and Shelley, were he to reappear as an undergraduate, would be expelled for other reasons but with equal finality and in the same uncompromising spirit. Shelley was born to be a trouble maker and suffered the usual consequences.

But of what, precisely, did the famous tract with its horrendous title consist? The "Advertisement" which precedes the title page declares unmistakably the author's purpose and the spirit in which he pursued his inquiry:

*"As a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract, he earnestly entreats that those of his readers who may discover any deficiency in his reasoning, or may be in possession of proofs which his mind could never obtain, would offer them, together with their objections to the Public, as briefly, as methodically,*

*as plainly as he has taken the liberty of doing. Thro' deficiency of proof,*

"AN ATHEIST"

The tract consists of fourteen paragraphs, many of them quite short, to this effect: Proof of a Deity can be direct, as in His visible appearance to us; or, secondly, as our reason is forced to believe in Him, as the creator of the universe; or third, as we are convinced by the testimony of others who have seen Him. As individuals who have not seen God, are we convinced by reason that he is the author of the universe? The universe may as plausibly have always existed and therefore be without an author. What then of the argument from the testimony of witnesses? We can believe them only if our reason is convinced that it is less likely they should have deceived themselves than that Deity should appear to them. But we cannot believe the testimony of men who declare not only were they eye-witnesses of miracles but that the Deity was irrational, commanding that he be believed and threatening eternal punishment for disbelief. "We can only command voluntary actions, belief is not an act of volition, the mind is even passive." It being irrational to command belief, we have therefore no reasonable proof that God exists. "It is almost unnecessary to observe, that the general knowledge of the deficiency of such proof, cannot be prejudicial to society: Truth has always been found to promote the best interests of mankind.—Every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity. Q. E. D."

The Oxford authorities should have been more appreciative of the form of this little piece and less alarmed by its heresy. Surely it was an unusual freshman who knew his Locke and his Hume so well and had so nice a taste in dialectics. Here is a youngster, they should have said, with a sense for prose style. It is spare, incisive, exact. If reason, somewhat inadequately, seems to be the sole inhabitant of his mental world it is a defect which time will remedy. On the grounds of reasoning and of style this is an extraordinary paper for a freshman and should be given an A. The authorities did nothing of the kind, being wholly blind to the evidence of those intellectual powers which they professed to admire and were supposed to direct. A great scholar was lost to the academic life and a great rebel, reformer, and poet was gained for the world.

<sup>11</sup> The ensuing incidents were not without pain to the rebel, he being young and not wholly hardened to adversity. The extraordinary correspondence which Mr. Ingpen has unearthed reveals Mr. Tim-

othy Shelley as one of the least intelligent parents on record! Immediately he cancelled an invitation to Hogg to spend the Easter holidays at Field Place. His son meanwhile delayed in writing his account of the expulsion but after three days of silence wrote his father a well-put, dignified letter, enclosing a copy of the tract, upon which survives written in his father's hand the one word "Impious." The tract's purpose and its reception Shelley thus describes: "We therefore embodied our doubts on the subject and arranged them methodically in the form of 'The Necessity of Atheism,' thinking thereby to obtain a satisfactory or an unsatisfactory answer from men who had made Divinity the study of their lives. How then were we treated? not as our fair, open, candid conduct might demand, no argument was publicly brought forward to disprove our reasoning, and it at once demonstrated the weakness of their cause, and their inveteracy on discovering it, when they publicly expelled myself and my friend."

Thereupon ensued a tragi-comedy of cross-purposes, stubbornness, parental tyranny and pig-headedness, all further complicated by Timothy Shelley's putting negotiations for a reconciliation with his son in the hands of the family solicitor. This action Shelley justly resented. His early offer not to publish anything more of an atheistical character if he might but choose his profession and continue to correspond with his friend Hogg, a reasonable enough proposal, his father had refused. There must be complete surrender and the eating of humble pie. The solicitor approved of this exercise of parental authority and took a high tone which provoked Shelley to an angry reply and a refusal to deal further with him. The original issue was lost sight of. The contest became a struggle of wills. Timothy Shelley was bent on subduing his son completely as though he were a refractory colt. But perhaps to a colt he would have shown greater understanding and kindness. The son in this correspondence seems more reasonable, more mature, than the father. What little filial devotion he had previously felt, and it appears that as a small boy he had loved his father, disappears under the exercise of paternal tyranny. Phrases from Timothy Shelley's letters to his son and to the solicitor sufficiently indicate his stubbornness and stupidity: "My feelings as a Christian require from me a decided and firm conduct towards you"; "your errors and present unjustifiable and wicked opinions;" "The wicked pursuit of an opinion so diabolical and wicked;" "my son's disrespectful and undutiful answer;" "undutiful and disrespectful to a degree;" "the apostate;" "his conduct and opinions, which . . . are not only extremely singular but abhorrent

in a Christian Society." In these and similar utterances Timothy Shelley seems inextricably to have confused the respect due himself with that due the Creator.<sup>1</sup>

So in his nineteenth year Shelley was cast adrift with a small allowance, with but few friends and little knowledge of the world of men and women, but with considerable experience of parental and institutional bigotry and intolerance, experience which confirmed all he had read in his heretical authors. He possessed, and must have known that he possessed, great intellectual powers. He was essentially self-educated; he had learned to acquire knowledge by his own efforts and to think his own thoughts. He had not been at home in the comfortable world to which he was born. Like De Quincey, who confessed the almost hypnotic power of the word "pariah" upon him, Shelley knew his kinship with the outcast and the despised. The knowledge did not crush him as a boy nor later when he was to encounter cruelty and bigotry in harsher forms. All the terms of affection or reproach, "Ariel," "The Snake," "mad Shelley," "atheist," fail to convey his essential quality, the spiritual invincibility of this bright-eyed boy who in Dublin passed for fifteen, and in his thirtieth year, when Trelawny knew him, seemed no more than a youth, a youth who could blush like a girl! He said to Trelawny, simply, "I go straight ahead until I am stopped and I never am stopped."<sup>2</sup>

The next period of Shelley's life was to be that of reformer and agitator, taking part as best he could in political and social movements, in especial in the cause of free speech, for in freedom of speech, he believed, as a true Godwinian, lay the sole guarantee of liberty and progress. To this cause he had already contributed during his Oxford stay. The case of Peter Finnerty, journalist, imprisoned by the government for libel and not allowed to prove the truth of the charges for which he was prosecuted, was a *cause célèbre* in the never ending battle for freedom of speech, which though seemingly guaranteed by precedent and the Bill of Rights, was not in practice allowed when those in authority were able to prevent. Shelley was contributor to a fund for Finnerty's relief and supposedly wrote a poem yielding £100 which was applied to this end. The poem has been the source of perplexity to Shelley's biographers. By some it has been thought the *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* was meant, published in November of 1810. Hogg gives an untrustworthy account of this work, alleging that he induced Shelley to alter and burlesque the original lines. The assertion is probably born of Hogg's vanity. The first poem of the group certainly does not read

like a burlesque. It is an indictment of war quite in the vein of *Queen Mab*. Oppressors and kings, ambition, power, and avarice are damned eloquently in Shelley's early rhetorical vein, but there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the indictment. It is incredible, likewise, that Shelley ever derived £100 from the work.

It is incredible that Shelley ever derived £100 from any work despite the legend in this instance to that effect. The disputed poem seems to have been, on circumstantial but plausible evidence, one advertised in Oxford on March 2, 1811, as "A Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things. By a Gentleman of the University of Oxford. For assisting to maintain in Prison Mr. Peter Finnerty, Imprisoned for a Libel." But the poem itself is lost. That it was an early form of *Queen Mab* seems not unlikely. Its sentiments can safely be surmised: denunciation of tyranny, war, bigotry, and avarice. These are themes to which Shelley is faithful throughout his creative life nor does his hatred of them change, though his explanation of them grows vastly in subtlety from *Queen Mab* to *Prometheus*. The exposition of Shelley's early radical sentiments can be deferred until a later examination of *Queen Mab*. But it is typical of Shelley even so early as his Oxford days that he was willing not only to contribute financially to causes he thought right but to work in their behalf. It is probable, also, that Shelley's Irish sympathies were strengthened by the Finnerty case, whose prosecution was due originally to an indictment of the cruelties practiced by the Castlereagh administration in Ireland.

Shelley's devotion to the liberal cause is illustrated further by a letter to Leigh Hunt on March 2, 1811, shortly before Shelley's expulsion. Leigh Hunt and his brother, several times indicted for their criticism of governmental tyranny, had published an article on military flogging, had been prosecuted and, defended by Brougham, had been released. Shelley, who was to meet and know Hunt well in later years, wrote him a letter of congratulation. Shelley speaks of this "triumph so highly to be prized by men of liberality," and proposes an organization of "enlightened and unprejudiced members of the community, whose independent principles expose them to evils which might thus become alleviated; and to form a methodical society, which should be organized so as to resist the coalition of the enemies of liberty, which at present renders any expression of opinion on matters of policy dangerous to individuals. It has been for want of societies of this nature, that corruption has attained the height at which we now behold it." He would model it after the society of the *Illuminati*, a secret society influential prior to the French revolution.

<sup>1</sup>He calls Hunt "a common friend to *liberty*" and makes this statement as to his own situation and plans: "My father is in parliament, and on attaining twenty-one, I shall in all probability fill his vacant seat. On account of the responsibility, to which my residence in the University subjects me, I, of course, dare not publicly avow all I think, but the time will come when I hope that my every endeavour, insufficient as this may be, will be directed to the advancement of liberty."<sup>1</sup>

His alienation from his father due to the expulsion from Oxford shortly blasted this hope of a political career. It is a futile but intriguing speculation as to what that career might have been. That Shelley had oratorical powers is shown by his experience a little later in Ireland, and in social converse he was, by all the testimony extant, facile and engaging, possessed of great skill in argument, which he could conduct without becoming personal and irritating. With these gifts and the fortune he was to inherit, he would have been a formidable man in the years which witnessed the long slow contest which resulted in the Reform Bill. His political talents were never to be employed save as expressed in such a prose production as *A Proposal for Putting Reform to a Vote* and the posthumous *A Philosophical View of Reform*. In these, as will be seen, he is no wild-eyed visionary but a liberal with a genuine sense for political actualities, <sup>2</sup>The accidents of life made him a poet and Utopian propagandist rather than a member of parliament and practicing politician. It is impossible to weigh values, to assess his practical worth to society in the one rôle rather than the other; but had Shelley been free to make a choice there is no doubt that he would have been a reformer and political philosopher rather than a poet. His greatest concern was for the misery of mankind, whose relief he saw in altered political institutions. He became something greater than a politician, his influence being destined to persist for a few of each generation over a long period of time; but his immediate influence on the institutions and on the thought of his day was slight.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The reader of today is apt vaguely to associate Shelley with the French Revolutionary school of thought, with the prophets and visionaries who led up to the revolutions in America and France and the momentary triumph, in a few instances, of democratic ideals. Though deriving from this tradition and sharing its hopes Shelley spent his short life wholly in the period of the Napoleonic wars and the even blacker period of reaction which immediately followed.<sup>4</sup> The situation in modern terms is analogous to that of one who, as a child, saw the World War begin, as an adolescent witnessed the

witch-hunting and Red-baiting years that followed, and grew to manhood in the even blacker period of reaction and loss of idealism in which (1935) we now live.¶The disappointed radicals of Shelley's time were as numerous as now; there were as many then as now who, in the failure of their youthful hopes, had become believers in the strong hand and autocratic rule. Such were the effects of war and social unrest upon all but men of the strongest convictions. Among Shelley's poetical contemporaries, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey, once hot revolutionaries, had early become conservative or even wholly reactionary. Hazlitt and Hunt, who had grown to manhood in the years prior to the Revolution, remained liberal but isolated figures and suffered for their beliefs, Leigh Hunt by actual imprisonment. Godwin, a largely forgotten figure, had adapted himself to the times and was unmolested, as innocuous, by officialdom. Men were going to gaol or suffering transportation for the expression of liberal beliefs and for attacks upon governmental tyranny, but writers of repute were not among them. Shelley grew to radicalism and remained true to it in an environment and amid influences seemingly most inimical to such a faith.¶

How then explain him? The innate character of the man, the mysterious endowment, cannot be explained. He was born with certain aptitudes, certain innate qualities. He was by nature a doubter and a rebel, one who questioned authority. The mishaps of boyhood and youth, the accidents of environment, strengthened in him the will to resist, whereas a weaker nature would have buckled and gone under. Once the critical years were past and he had grown strong in opposition there was, then, in the character of the times ample to feed his hatred of injustice and oppression.¶In happier easier-going days before the Napoleonic wars and their consequent burdens of debt, profiteering, and poverty, before, too, the industrial revolution had wrought its havoc to the working classes, the misery of the world would have been not so evident to one born like Shelley to the privileged classes. His contacts with extreme poverty, with legal injustice, with feudal tyranny would probably have been few. It was a terrible period in which he passed his short life, years of hate and oppression. To an imaginative and radical man it was intolerable to contemplate the scene inactively. Either he must find an escape in the isolation of his own fancies or he must wage everlasting war, however futilely, with the powers of darkness. Shelley realized the choice offered him and the answer which he gave to it becomes clear in the chronological analysis of his work.¶¶

### CHAPTER III

#### *Agitator and Reformer*



It was in the month Shelley spent alone in London after Hogg's departure and before the truce set up between himself and his father permitted a return to Field Place, that the fatal connection with the Westbrooks was made. Harriet Westbrook, schoolmate of Shelley's sisters Mary and Hellen, was kind to him in his loneliness and showed herself to be "very charitable and good." He writes (April 24, 1811): "My little friend Harriet Westbrook is gone to her prison-house [school].... The youngest is a most amiable girl; the eldest is really conceited, but very condescending." The latter, Eliza, much older than Harriet and a calculating piece, evidently saw possibilities in the young man of large financial prospects thrown thus her way. On April 28 Shelley writes: "My poor little friend has been ill, her sister sent for me the other night. I found her on a couch pale; her father is civil to me, very strangely; the sister is too civil by half. She began talking about *l'Amour*." Shelley it seems was not wholly without discretion. Yet he could not resist the temptation of winning converts to the holy cause of religious scepticism and universal benevolence. On May 12 he writes: "I am now at Miss Westbrook's. She is reading Voltaire's '*Dictionnaire Philosophique*.'" Shelley's seductions were intellectual and their success was always costly and sometimes fatal. Harriet Westbrook lent herself only too readily to his guidance, came to rely upon it, and in August, when she threw herself upon his protection, he saw nothing for it but to marry her. It would have asked more worldly wisdom than his to have foreseen and avoided such a catastrophe. Harriet was probably innocent of all conscious design, but the older sister cannot be so easily acquitted.

The letters to Hogg of this time suggest in Shelley a period of mental growth. He was much alone, wrote poetry, and reflected. The poetry, unless some of it was *Queen Mab* not published until two years later, is of slight importance. Among the themes of his discourse to Hogg are his cousin Harriet Grove: "She does not any longer permit a '*philosopher*' to correspond with her. She talks of duty to her *Father*. And this is your amiable religion!" His hatred of parental tyranny was heightened by his belief in parental hypocrisy. His father, it seemed, remarked in confidence to Captain Pilfold,



Shelley's uncle, "to tell you the truth, *I* am a Sceptic." Shelley was contemptuous of any such accession to the ranks of unbelievers: "But he is nothing—no *-ist*, professes no *-ism*, but superbism and irrationalism. He has forbidden my intercourse with my sister, but the Captain brought him to reason; he prevents it, however, as much as possible, which is very little. My mother is quite rational; she says, 'I think *prayer* and thanksgiving are of no use. If a man is a good man, philosopher, or Christian, he will do very well in whatever future state awaits us.' This I call liberality!"

His detestation of religionists at this time extends even to Christ himself. The following excerpt from a letter of April 24 to Hogg finds its parallel later in a passage in *Queen Mab* descriptive of the baneful influence of Christ: "'The Galilean is not a favourite of mine,' a French author writes. The French write audaciously—rashly. 'So far from owing him any thanks for his favours, I cannot avoid confessing that I owe a secret grudge to his carpentership—*charpenterie*. The reflecting part of the community, that part in whose happiness we philosophers have so strong an interest—certainly do not require his morality, which, where there is no *vice*, fetters *virtue*. Here we all agree. Let this horrid Galilean rule the *Canaille* then! I give them up.' And I give them up; I will no more mix politics and virtue, they are incompatible."

There is much of this same antireligious tenor in the letters together with one experience of a more constructive character which, in the light of Shelley's subsequent beliefs, is important. He had been invited to breakfast by a "man of letters" unnamed. "He is a Deist, despising superstition, etc., etc., yet having a high veneration for the Deity, as he affirmed. And, in consequence, a long argument arose between him and some of his acquaintance; that a Deist certainly means the same as an Atheist; they differ but in name. He would not allow this, with him the Deity is neither omnipotent, omnipresent, nor identical. He destroys, too, all those predicates in *non*, against which they entered their protest. He says, that God is comprehensible, not doubting but an adequate exertion of reason (which, he says, is by no means to be despaired of) would lead us from a contemplation of his works to a definite knowledge of his attributes, which are not unlimited. Now here is a new kind of God for you!

"In practice, such a Deist as this is, as they told him, an Atheist; for he believes that the Creator is by no means perfect, but composed of good and evil, like man, and producing that mixture of these principles which is evident everywhere. He is a man of cultivated mind, and

certainly exalted notions, and his friends do not entirely despair of rescuing him out of this damnable heresy from reason. His wife is a most sensible woman; she is by no means a bigot, but rather Deistically given. It is a curious fact that they were married when they were both Wesleyan Methodists, and subsequently converted each other."

The ideas which Shelley thus takes pains to record were evidently new to him. It is evident, also, that these or similar ideas elsewhere derived played a not unimportant part in his ultimate conception of Deity. The Deity of *Prometheus Unbound* is likewise limited, fallible, a mixture of good and evil, is, in short, a projection of man himself. Shelley in his later thought blends this conception with ideas derived from neo-Platonism. If we observe here the original of a concept later to bear important fruit in his philosophy we are fortunate in having a record of it in his own words.

Why this insistence upon Shelley's youthful speculations as to the existence and nature of Deity? Has it more than an adolescent importance despite the amount of space devoted to these themes in his youthful letters? It is, I believe, deeply significant of the character of Shelley's mind. Godwin, whose social philosophy had so great an influence on Shelley as rebel and reformer, is remarkably puerile as a metaphysician. He was content, apparently, to accept the *tabula rasa* psychology of Locke and Hume and their school and, for a metaphysics, the mechanistic dogmatism of Holbach, who says simply that the whole universe is a mechanism without creator or beginning and operates according to its inherent laws. Such an evasion of ultimate questions may suffice for a practical reformer or an experimental scientist but not for a philosopher. [The philosophy of ultimate causes, of the nature of being, and of the operations of the mind Shelley intuitively felt he must solve, sensing rather than understanding in his early years as a thinker that these problems necessarily were involved with the practical problems of man in society and the question of good and evil. Until Shelley had arrived at a more or less satisfactory answer to them he could not define an Utopian society adequate to his needs nor could he, as creative artist, as poet, depict the external universe with any great effectiveness. The metaphysical character of much of his verse, which is so deplored by some of his admirers, was something he could not escape. The nature of his lyricism likewise is dependent upon these metaphysical speculations. The problem of Deity was, therefore, with him, a central one, one not to be escaped, though, as I have said, his appreciation of its importance

seems to me in his nineteenth year and even later intuitive rather than reasoned. †

His differences with his father temporarily composed, Shelley returned to Field Place, a letter to Hogg with that heading being dated May 15, 1811. The ensuing weeks were dull ones. Shelley had a mad project of bringing Hogg to Field Place by stealth and there hiding him, the primary object being to promote a match between him and Elizabeth Shelley, his favorite sister. Intellectually Shelley was lonely, for his mother, though amiable, was little more, and his sister submitted to the family pressure and repudiated his dangerous heresies. He poured himself into his letters, to Hogg first of all and then increasingly to Elizabeth Hitchener, the school-teacher whom he had met while on a visit to his Uncle, Captain Pilfold, at Cuckfield. She was to prove one of his disappointments, one of the several friends whom, in his youth, he endowed with imaginary virtues and intellectual graces. She is, however, highly useful to the student of Shelley's mental history, for he discovered his ideas to her with his usual prodigality and lack of reserve.

A letter to Janetta Phillips (May 16), a young poetess whose work he was instrumental in having printed, is amusing as an instance of the freedom and boldness with which he entered into correspondence with people he had never met. Miss Phillips' contribution to this brief interchange is unfortunately lost. Evidently she was shocked at his profession of unorthodox beliefs. In his first letter he openly avowed them, fearful, apparently, lest she should be under any misapprehensions: "The pamphlet which I distributed among the learned questioned the existence of a Deity. In justice to myself I must also declare that a proof of *his* existence, or even the divine mission of Christ, would in no manner alter one idea on the subject of morality." Young Miss Phillips quite possibly found this saying dark and rather ominous. His second and last letter seemingly is in response to objections raised by her. He plunges at once into an argument on the nature of morality, its divorce from religion, and any need of future rewards. He speaks of prejudice and the world's opinion and concludes: "As you mention Religion, I will say, that my rejection of *revealed* proceeds from my perfect conviction of its insufficiency to the happiness of man—to this source *I* can trace murder, war, intolerance—my rejection of *natural* arises wholly from *reason*. I *once* was an enthusiastic Deist, but never a Christian." After this summary avowal, Miss Phillips withdrew from the contest, silenced if unconvinced.

Writing to Hogg (May 17) Shelley discourses on the hypocrisy of professing Christians. "The mass of mankind are Christians only in name; their religion has no reality. So little, indeed, that they almost confess the *world* to be the only reason for their yet retaining their mummeries. Christ is not the Son of God: the world is eternal, their practise would seem to declare.... The opinion of the world, the loss of which is attended with much Inconvenience, with the loss of reputation, which is by some considered as synonymous with virtue; —this is the support of many prejudices. Certain members of my family are no more Christians than Epicurus himself was; but they regard as a sacred criterion the opinion of the world; the disanonization of this saint of theirs is impossible until something more worthy of devotion is pointed out; but where eyes are shut, nothing can be seen! They would ask, are we wrong to regard the opinion of the world; what would compensate us for the loss of it? Good heavens! What a question!"

To Hogg again (May 19) Shelley writes of a mutual acquaintance, Faber: "Poor fool! His Christian mildness, his consistent forgiveness of injuries amuses me; he is '*le vrai esprit de Christianisme*,' which Helvetius talks of; he would call this a Christian." Shelley at this stage evidently would repudiate not only Christian doctrines but also the Christian virtues. All, he declares, are a sham. In this respect he was greatly to alter his opinions within the next few years, for in the character of Prometheus he exalts the virtue of forgiveness. Prometheus, in the spirit of Christ, forgives Jupiter, source of all evil, and in forgiving destroys his enemy.

Until Elizabeth Hitchener enters upon the scene of Shelley's correspondence the letters of the spring of 1811 are of a melancholy cast for the most part and repetitive in content. His sister Elizabeth is, "Now, apathetic to all things, except the trivial amusements and despicable intercourse of restrained conversation; bowing before that hellish idol, the *world*; appealing to its unjust decisions, in cases which demand a trial at the higher tribunal of conscience." He writes to Hogg in a similar vein of disillusionment, whether of his sister or his cousin, Harriet Grove: "I loved a being, an idea in my own mind, which had no real existence. I concreted this abstract of perfection, I annexed this fictitious quality to the idea presented by a *name*; the being, whom that name signified, was by no means worthy of this." Shelley was to "concrete the abstract of perfection" many times, in his poetry to its enrichment, in his personal life mostly to his loss. Fresh from the disappointments of his affections in sister and

cousin he poured his idealization into the mold of Elizabeth Hitchener.

Characteristically his approach to her is intellectual. On June 6 he writes: "Dear Madam, I desired Locke to be sent to you from London, and the Captain [Pilfold] has two books which he will give you... 'The Curse of Kehama,' and Ensor's 'National Education.' The latter is the production of a very clever man." Ensor was a radical and at a later date wrote works attacking the English administration in Ireland. He continues, "I fear our arguments are too long, and too candidly carried on, to make any figure on paper. . . . If, however, secure of your own orthodoxy, you would attempt my proselytism, believe me I should be most happy to subject myself to the danger. But I know that you, like myself, are a devotee at the shrine of Truth. Truth is *my* God; and *say* he is Air, Water, Earth, or Electricity, but I think *yours* is reducible to the same simple Divinityship." He fears to take her time in "a polemical correspondence" but assures her that his "is totally vacant." It was an opening of which Miss Hitchener immediately availed herself. The letter concludes with a remark on Scott's newly published *The Vision of Don Roderick* which he promises to send her. He observes, "I am not very enthusiastic in the cause of Walter Scott. The aristocratical tone which his writings assume does not prepossess me in his favour, since my opinion is that all poetical beauty ought to be subordinate to the inculcated moral . . . that metaphorical language ought to be a pleasing vehicle for useful and momentous instruction. But see Ensor on the subject of poetry." Who is it contends that all originality in us is manifest before we are twenty and that we spend our later years in refining upon and expressing it? The theory finds support in Shelley, though his earlier conception of the "inculcated moral" and the "useful and momentous instruction" undergoes drastic modification in the course of his poetic life. So, too, was his early surmise that the true God might be Electricity destined to a strange amplification and refinement in his matured philosophy.

Elizabeth Hitchener brought it on herself. In his next letter to her (June 11) Shelley proceeds to a thorough examination of the fundamentals of religion in the light of Locke's psychology. "Locke *proves* there are no innate ideas, that in consequence, there can be no innate speculative or practical principles, thus overturning all appeals of *feeling* in favor of Deity, since that feeling must be referable to some origin. There must have been a time when it did not exist. . . This *feeling* must have originated from some sensual excitation." Locke however affirms a belief in God and the divine inspiration of St.

Paul's writings. "Which are we to prefer?" Shelley declares that he has no objection to a belief in God on the score of feeling. He would like to believe but cannot. "My wish to convince you of his non-existence is twofold; first on the score of truth, secondly because I conceive it to be the most summary way of eradicating Christianity." Christianity militates against the high pursuit of virtue. To accept it demands the surrender of reason to blind faith. Christianity is passion; Deism, reason. "What then is a 'God'? It is a name which expresses the unknown cause, the suppositious origin of all existence." God is to the universe what the animating cause, soul, is to the body. "I acknowledge a God, but merely as a synonyme [sic] for *the existing power of existence*. . . . It is therefore the essence of the universe." It is the God of theism, a God outside of the universe, a Creator, that Shelley repudiates. The Christian God of the Old Testament was not a God of virtue but a cruel God, as Mars, also the creation of man, was a cruel God. To believe in such a God is to deny a belief in virtue. The cruel Gods, who are born of man's imaginings, are thus incredible to reason. Yet Shelley concludes oddly: "I recommend reason.—Why? Is it because, since I have devoted myself unreservedly to its influencing, I have never felt *happiness*? I have rejected all fancy, all imagination; I find that all pleasure resulting to self is thereby completely annihilated." It is an acute bit of self-analysis. Reason, clearly, does not suffice for happiness. But what of fancy and imagination is permissible to reason?

A few days later, writing to Hogg (June 16), all the animation evident in his letter to Elizabeth Hitchener is absent. He had thrashed out his philosophy with Hogg and it is emotions which he writes of. He is in a despairing mood. "Where is *she* whom I adored? Alas! Where is virtue? Where is perfection? Where I cannot reach. Is there another existence? No! Then I can never reach it. Is there another existence? Yes! Then I shall live there, rendering and rendered happy." William James in a robust passage somewhere speculates upon a possible immortality for every living being, for every leaf. Shelley, too, considers the possibility but obviously with faint hope only, rather than with any strong will to believe: "Perhaps the flowers think like this; perhaps they moralize upon their state, have their attachments, their pursuits of virtue; adore, despond, hope, despise. Alas! then do we, like them, perish; or do they, likewise, live forever?" And he concludes strangely: "I am going to take the sacrament. In spite of my melancholy reflections, the idea rather amuses and soothes me."

In his letter of June 20 to Elizabeth Hitchener, Shelley pursues a severe course of reasoning on the nature of Christianity and virtue. Surely the woman was a glutton for punishment. Or was it to the emotional overtones (largely fancied) that she bent an ear? Sternly he demonstrates that insofar as she pursues virtue it is not Christianity more than Mohammedanism which she professes. There are incidental ethical values to all religions. "Virtue is self-evident, consequently I act in unison with its dictates, where the doctrines of Christ do not differ from virtue; *there* I follow *them*." He was at this time very clear on the subject of virtue: "We see virtue and vice... distinct; the line which divides them is glaringly perceptible." On immortality he is less dogmatic. All we know "is that we now *are*, that there was a time when we were not. . . . But could we have arisen from nothing? . . . Is . . . soul annihilable?" He believes everything in nature "is in a continual change, then do I suppose . . . that neither will soul perish; that in a future existence it will lose all consciousness of having formerly lived elsewhere,—will begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have now no idea. But we have no right to make hypotheses—this is not one: at least I flatter myself that I have kept clear of supposition." He concludes with a caustic comment on a costly *fête* given at Carlton House, June 19, by the Prince Regent. He likens it to the "disgusting splendours of the stage of the Roman Empire which preceded its destruction! Yet here are a people advanced in intellectual improvement—wilfully rushing to a revolution, the natural death of all great commercial empires, which must plunge them in the barbarism from which they are slowly arising." A few lines from verses written on this theme survive but are of no particular merit or significance.

On June 25 Shelley discourses to Miss Hitchener on the fallen state of Man. We assume Man's fallen state, he avers, only on the evidence of the Scriptures. How are we to believe Man ever existed in a superior state? Then by an ambiguous transition he passes to the observable harmony of the universe. Is not this also illusory? So may horses reason of the harmony of man's world, which "is the harmony of irregular confusion, which equalizes everything by being itself unequal, wherever it acts. . . ." Is the soul annihilated at death? May not death be in this respect, like sleep, and the soul therein exist in a state of suspended animation? He wishes Miss Hitchener to examine this argument: "*Atheism* appears a terrific monster at a distance; dare to examine it . . . it loses half its terrors." In theology he avers he advances "with caution and circumspection . . . but in politics . . .

*here* I am enthusiastic." He is, he declares, "no aristocrat, nor any 'crat' at all; but vehemently long[s] for the time when man may *dare* to live in accordance with *Nature* and Reason, in consequence with Virtue." Had Mr. R. Clarke, friend of Mr. John Hogg, father of Thomas Jefferson Hogg, been privileged to read the Shelley-Hitchener correspondence, he would, I suspect, have been more emphatic even than he was in reporting on the eccentric youth recently expelled from Oxford. He writes on April 6: "Shelley is son to the Member for Shoreham. He has always been odd, I find, and suspected of insanity; but of great acquirements." So passionate and feverish a concern as Shelley displays for the problems of theology can only be explained in a "young gentleman of fortune" on the score of congenital affliction. And even more reprehensible than his religious madness were his equalitarian heresies. There need be added for his complete damnation among solid and respectable folk only a disrespect for the holy laws of matrimony. This, in due time, he was also egregiously to display. He has in a letter to Hogg of July 4 the audacity to declare: "What is Enthusiasm, whether in religion, politics, or morality? All equally, inextricably fatuous." Sometimes he writes almost as though he had a sense of humor.

The next phase of Shelley's life begins with his visit to his cousin's estate in Wales in July, 1811. Despite a nervous illness "occasioned by several nights of sleeplessness," he writes with his customary enthusiasm on the horrors of religion, citing a newspaper account of a "wretch" tried "at Tortola for the *murder* of his *slave*." The murderer remarked in his address to the jury, "I have a *proper sense of religion*." This declares to Shelley a self-evident truth, "that Religion is bad for man." He quotes from Helvetius: "'Modes of worship differ, they are therefore the work of men—Morality is accordant, *universal*, and uniform, therefore it is the Work of God'—or, as I should say, it is *Morality* which I cannot but consider as synonymous with the Deist's God." Characteristically he concludes with an incident illustrative of his other ruling passion, his hatred of social inequality. He had vainly endeavored to enter into conversation with a beggar who in these words begged him to desist: "I see by your dress that you are a rich man. They have injured me and mine a million times—you appear to be well intentioned, but I have no security of it while you live in such a house as that, or wear such clothes as those. It would be charity to quit me."<sup>1</sup>

To Miss Hitchener he resumes (July 25) on the theme of equality, which she had protested was unattainable. "So, will I observe, is per-



fection; yet they both symbolize in their nature, they both demand that an unremitting tendency towards themselves should be made; and the nearer society approaches towards this point the happier will it be. No one has yet been found resolute enough in dogmatizing to deny that Nature made man equal; that society has destroyed this equality is a truth not more incontrovertible." The evils of society are due to this inequality: "The noble has too much, therefore *he* is wretched and wicked, the peasant has too little. . . . Are not then the consequences the same from causes which nothing but *equality* can annihilate? . . . Ridicule perfection as impossible . . . Do more: prove it by arguments which are irresistible. . . . Still a strenuous tendency towards this principle, however unattainable, cannot be considered as wrong." Apparently Miss Hitchener had given up the religious controversy, overwhelmed by a fluency too great to cope with. But Shelley will not let her off so easily and proceeds to "sum up the evidence." He proceeds after the fashion of Voltaire with a brief summary of the cruelties and bloodshed perpetrated by the warring sects of Christians in the Greek Empire and under the popes and patriarchs, down to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the Lord George Gordon riots. "It is this empire of terror which is established by Religion. Monarchy is its prototype, Aristocracy may be regarded as symbolizing with its very essence. They are mixed: one can now scarce be distinguished from the other."

¶ He pursues the theme, the social evils of inequality, in his letter of July 26 to Miss Hitchener: "Equality is natural, at least many evils totally inconsistent with a state which symbolizes with Nature prevail in every system of inequality. I will assume this point, therefore, even although it be your opinion, or *my* opinion that equality is unattainable except by a parcel of peas or beans, still political virtue is to be estimated in proportion as it approximates to this ideal point of perfection, however unattainable. But what can be worse than the present aristocratical system? Here are in England ten millions, only 500,000 of whom live in a state of ease; the rest earn their livelihood with toil and care. If therefore these 500,000 aristocrats who possess resources of various degrees of immensity, were to permit these resources to be resolved into their original stock; that is, entirely to destroy it, if each earned his own living (which I do not see is at all incompatible with the *height* of intellectual refinement, then I affirm that each would be happy and contented, that crime and the temptation to crime would scarcely exist.—'But this paradise is all visionary.'—Why is it visionary? Have you tried?" It is a temperate

and reasonable statement of the case for economic equality and reveals Shelley to be, young as he was, alive to the socialistic implications of the democratic doctrine. In the era preceding the French Revolution the equalitarians and reformers had directed their energies to the attainment of manhood suffrage, and to the establishment of a republican form of government. Many of them, being of the middle classes, had envisaged no drastic economic changes save the juster imposition of tax burdens. A few only, such as Mary Wollstonecraft in her observations upon the French Revolution, had perceived that the abolition of kings and titles was but a superficial reform. To call everyone Citizen was well enough, but if one citizen possessed ten times the wealth of another he remained in every essential one of a privileged class, an aristocrat. Godwin dismissed the economic problem with a gesture. Were we all reasonable people we should, upon request, share our superfluity with the needy. Shelley lays greater emphasis upon the evils of an uneven distribution of wealth, perhaps taking his cue from Thomas Paine, who was far more a realist than was Godwin.

Shelley goes on to expound the principles of natural justice. "If two children were placed together in a desert island, and they found some scarce fruit, would not justice dictate an equal division? If this number is multiplied to any extent of which number is capable, if these children are men, families,—is not justice capable of the same extension and multiplication? Is it not the same, are not its decrees invariable? and, for the sake of his earth-formed schemes, has the politician a right to infringe upon that which itself constitutes all right and wrong? Surely not." In accepting this theory of natural rights Shelley presumably rationalizes on the doctrine of Locke that the mind at birth is a blank tablet and that we are made individually what we are by the sensations which come to us, by the stress of environment. Arguably, were the environment identical for all, we should all be alike. But in reality, not only for Shelley but for all equalitarians, the belief, and the fervor of its advocacy, derives from an unacknowledged religious intuition, faith in the infinite spiritual value of every individual soul and hence their equality in some mystical, some potential sense. The equalitarian belief had its origin with the Levelers of Cromwellian days. The eighteenth century, disavowing religion, attempted to rationalize the belief in terms of the mechanistic philosophy of Locke. Shelley at eighteen years is still the avowed disciple of reason but not wholly happy in his beliefs. He remarks in the same letter in words of great interest coming from

a youth destined to poetic greatness and an ultimate pantheism: "Nature is here marked with the most impressive characters of lordliness and grandeur, once I was tremulously alive to tones and scenes . . . the habit of analysing feelings I fear does not agree with this. It is spontaneous, and, when it becomes subject to consideration, ceases to exist. . . . But you do right to indulge feeling where it does not militate with reason: I wish I could too."

The purely literary references in the letters of this period are few but not without interest. He several times commends Miss Owen's novel *The Missionary* whence he later derived some of the descriptive background of *Alastor*. He had admired, too, the earlier poems of Felicia Browne, subsequently Mrs. Hemans, and now endeavored unsuccessfully to open a correspondence with her. He also mentions for the first time, in a letter to Hogg of July 28, the works of Erasmus Darwin. "I amuse myself . . . with reading Darwin, climbing rocks, and exploring scenery." The influence of Darwin is evident in passages of *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound* and presumptively upon Shelley's ultimate philosophy. Superficially it is an odd fact that Darwin should so greatly have influenced him, for Darwin is a frigid and graceless poet and his scientific epics are written in bad heroic couplets. But this is only a matter of form. Shelley saw deeper, and the content of Darwin's poems, his copious notes on all matters scientific, both factual and theoretical, was a stimulus to his scientific curiosity and to his philosophical speculations. He had but to pursue Darwin's notes and references to enter easily into the whole field of science as it existed in the decade 1790-1800, a time of vast scientific inquiry and progress. Darwin was more than an experimenter. He was in the truest sense a natural philosopher, speculative and daring, one of the first to formulate the theory of biological evolution. In this he fully anticipates Lamarck by some years. The evolutionary thesis of Shelley's later philosophy, both physical and moral, owes much to Darwin, though the exact extent of the indebtedness it is not possible to determine. It is plausible, likewise, to assume that Shelley's inclusion of so much scientific lore in *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus* was modeled not only on the similar practice of Lucretius but of Darwin also. Darwin was an inferior poet but his reading was immense, his imagination stimulating, his speculations often fanciful and absurd, but occasionally, too, sublime.

In a letter of August 1, to Stockdale, the publisher, Shelley says, "I am at present engaged in completing a series of moral and meta-

physical essays." Presumably these are the precursors of or, it may be, the actual prose fragments of our later consideration. Buxton Forman and William Rossetti ascribe these compositions to the year 1815 mostly, in the belief, doubtless, that Shelley at the age of nineteen was not sufficiently mature to have composed them. Whatever later revision they underwent, it is probable their inception was earlier, a striking but not incredible fact. Shelley's intellectual powers developed earlier than his poetic as has been to this stage of his history amply evident. It would be unreasonable to predict of him at the age of nineteen any great future as a poet. His concern is with social and moral philosophy and with problems of metaphysics. In prose he expresses himself with far greater vigor, clarity, and trenchancy than in verse. It might be predicted of him as of the younger Mill that he would develop into an intellectual monster, that the emotional springs in him were drying up because of his disappointment in love, the loneliness of his life, and the solace which he sought in books. He is, to some extent, still a reader of poetry but is seemingly no longer interested in the wild romances of his boyhood. Nature, as he has confessed, does not stir in him the response it once did. Of music, painting, sculpture he has neither knowledge nor the opportunity to acquire knowledge. Reason is his sole resource, and though he feels reason to be arid he has no means, seemingly, to a better way of life, one in which the emotional forces withering away within him will have opportunity to grow and flower. Harriet Westbrook, his marriage, and all the happiness and tragedy which were to spring therefrom, restored him to a world of feeling. He was destined to excess of emotional experience. In the later, the philosophic, years in Italy, he was to reconcile reason and emotion and develop a philosophy which had a place for both.

On August 3 Shelley wrote to Hogg, "I shall certainly come to York, but *Harriet Westbrook* will decide whether now or in three weeks. Her father has persecuted her in a most horrible way, by endeavouring to compel her to go to school. She asked my advice: resistance was the answer, at the same time that I essayed to mollify Mr. Westbrook in vain! And in consequence of my advice *she* has thrown herself upon *my* protection.

"I set off for London on Monday. How flattering a distinction!—I am thinking of ten million things at once.

"What have I said? I declare, quite *ludicrous*, I advised her to resist. She wrote to say that resistance was useless, but that she would fly with me, and threw herself upon my protection. We shall

have £200 a year: when we find it run short, we must live, I suppose, upon love! Gratitude and admiration all demand that I should love her *for ever*. We shall see you at York. I will hear your arguments for matrimonialism, by which I am now almost convinced." And ten days later, seemingly in acceptance of Hogg's arguments in behalf of marriage, which Shelley, as a disciple of Godwin, condemned in theory, he writes, "My arguments have been *yours*. They have been urged by the force of the gratitude which this occasion excited. . . . I never was so fit for calm argument, as now. This, I fear, more resembles exerted action than inspired passion." This is not the language of a young man deeply in love, not the language Shelley had employed when in love with his cousin, Harriet Grove. It is more like the language of a political agitator who, having incited a local demonstration which unexpectedly has become a revolution, feels duty-bound to see the business through even though at some risk to himself.

In a letter of October 8 to Miss Hitchener he defends himself for having married: "You will enquire how *I*, an *Atheist*, chose to subject myself to the ceremony of marriage,—how my conscience could consent to it. . . . Why I united myself thus to a female as it is not in itself immoral, can make no part in diminution of my rectitude. . . . this if misconceived, may. *I* am indifferent to reputation, all are not." He proceeds to discuss the penalties unjustly incurred by those who defy the marriage convention: "How useless to attempt by singular examples to renovate the face of society, until reasoning has made so comprehensive a change as to emancipate the experimentalist from the resulting evils." He had in a letter of August 15 to Hogg written, "My unfortunate friend, Harriet, is yet undecided. . . . I am become a perfect convert to matrimony. . . . the sacrifice made by the woman, so disproportioned to any which the man can give,—this alone may exculpate me." In thus sacrificing principle to social convention Shelley but followed the precedent of Godwin, who had married Mary Wollstonecraft only that their expected child might escape the stigma of illegitimacy. In both instances marriage was the sacrifice of a social principle for sufficient cause.

These personal considerations, which mar the consistency of principle, did not at first affect the relations of Shelley and Elizabeth Hitchener. The letters to her of August 10 and 19, while Shelley was in the midst of the perturbation incident to his impending elopement with Harriet Westbrook, pursue the argument in the case for equality. He writes from London: "I here see palaces the thirtieth part

of which would bless with every requisite of habitation their pampered owners . . . theatres converted from schools of morality into places for the inculcation of abandonment of every moral principle, whilst the haughty aristocrat, and the commercial monopolist unite in sanctioning by example the depravities to which the importations of the latter give rise. All monopolies are bad. I do not, however, when condemning commercial aggrandizement, think it in the least necessary to panegyryze hereditary accumulation.—Both are flagrant encroachments on liberty, neither can be used as an antidote for the poison of the other . . . Take the best aristocrat. He monopolizes a large house, gold dishes, glittering dresses: his very servants are decked in magnificence. How does *one* monopoly differ from another,—that of the mean Duke from that of the mean pacer between the pillars of the exchange? Having once established the position that a state of equality (if attainable), were preferable to any other, I think that the unavoidable inference must induce us to confess the irrationality of aristocracy . . . Intellectual inequality could never be obviated until moral perfection be attained: then all distinctions would be levelled.” Miss Hitchener, however, was unable to accept this equalitarian doctrine as between the two of them. In his letter of August 19 he declares she reminds him of his “misfortune” that he should be born rich, she poor; that there is no “*real* difference” subsisting between them. “You remind me of what I hate, despise, and shudder at, what willingly I would not and the part from which I can emancipate myself in this detestable coil of primaeval prejudice, that will I free myself from.—Have I not forsworn all this? am I not a worshipper of equality?” The differences amongst men, he declares, are not innate. There are no innate ideas. The differences amongst men are not due to Nature but to Art; they are, that is, man-made.

On October 10, writing from York, whither he had taken Harriet after their marriage in Edinburgh, Shelley addresses Elizabeth Hitchener as “My dearest friend (for I will call you so), *you* who understand my motives to action, which, I flatter myself, unisonize with your own, you who can condemn the world’s prejudices, whose views are mine, I will dare to say I *love*: nor do I risk the possibility of that degrading and contemptible interpretation of this sacred word, nor do I risk the supposition that the lump of organized matter which enshrines thy soul excites the love which that soul alone dare claim . . . Henceforth will I be yours—yours with truth, sincerity and unreserve.” He protests “you are the sister of my soul, its dearest sister, and I think

the component parts of that soul must undergo complete dissolution before its sympathies can perish." These affairs of the imagination, these idealizations, these recognitions of soulmates and affinities, doomed as they all are to tragi-comic fiasco, whether in the case of Hogg, or Elizabeth Hitchener, or Emilia Viviani, are the episodes of Shelley's life for which the apologist has most to blush. Shelley did a great number of Quixotic things for which no apology need be made. His attempt to convert the Irish people to sobriety and brotherly love is a notable instance. Common sense would have pronounced such an attempt unlikely of success. But there is in it an element of the sublime. Great reformers, great preachers, all who pursue some inner light, make themselves ridiculous to the children of this world. Visionaries provoke the laughter of the smug. This is right enough; but the private exposure of the soul in its need and its trust is somehow horrible. These should never be put into words save indirectly, cloaked in some symbol to shield the soul in its nakedness. Shelley learned ultimately to be wary, though at great cost. He was not unaware in *Epipsychidion* that he embraced a cloud; he understood and analyzed the weakness in himself, the need, the incompleteness, which made him pursue phantoms of his imagination. But these Hitcheners and Hogg and Godwins and the rest who betrayed his love or took his money are a sad lot. The reader blushes that Shelley should have been so gullible even though his sanguine trust be but a defect of his qualities.

It is with relief that we turn from the Elizabeth Hitchener, the sister of his soul, to her, the correspondent, who is no more than the recipient of Shelley's outpourings of social philosophy and metaphysics: "*Reason* can never either account for, or prove the truth of, feeling. . . . I have considered it in every possible light; and reason tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man, yet I feel, I believe the direct contrary. . . . The senses are the only inlets of knowledge, and there is an inward sense that has persuaded me of this." Abruptly he is off on another tack: "I still desire money, and I desire it because I think I know the use of it. It commands labor, it gives leisure, and to give leisure to those who will employ it in the forwarding of truth is the noblest present an individual can make to the whole." He asks her advice on the use he shall put his estate to, once it is his. "Mankind are as much my brethren and sisters as they [his sisters]: all ought to share. This cannot be; it must be confined. But thou art a sister of *my soul*, *he* is its brother: surely these have a right." Elizabeth Hitchener and, presumably, Hogg, may very well

have cherished hopes. Happily for Shelley they did not greatly exploit him, though the pensioning of Elizabeth Hitchener was an expense he could ill afford. But for the generosity of his uncle, Shelley writes, "We should still [have] been chained to the filth and *commerce* of Edinburgh. Vile as aristocracy is, commerce—purse-proud ignorance and illiterateness—is more contemptible.... I still see Religion to be immoral. When I contemplate these gigantic piles of superstition—when I consider too the leisure for the exercise of mind, which the labour which erected them annihilated—I set them down as so many retardations of the period when truth becomes omnipotent." He considers the vast destruction of "invaluable leisure" in their erection and continues, "How many things could we do without! How unnecessary are *mahogany* tables, silver vases, myriads of viands and liquors, expensive printing, that worst of all." The book lover willing to sacrifice bindings and rag papers and fine typography on the altar of equality must be thought of as sincere to the point of fanaticism.

To Elizabeth Hitchener he writes (October 12) broaching his Utopian project of a home to which might come those he most cared for: "My friend Hogg, Harriet, my new sister,... could but be added to these the sister of my soul, *that* I cannot hope; but still she may visit us." Later he insisted that she live with them, with results disastrous to friendship. Characteristically abrupt, he turns from his projected home dedicated to friendship and intellectual debate to a new theme: "I have long been convinced of the eventual omnipotence of mind over matter: adequacy of motive is sufficient to anything, and *my* golden age is when the present potency will become omnipotence." Godwin expresses a similar idea. It is one to which Shelley clung and in his later works presents with interesting moral and metaphysical accretions. He writes again two weeks later on his return from Cuckfield and London whither he had gone to get money. He explains in this letter how he came to marry Harriet. He had corresponded with her "designing that her advancement should keep pace with, and possibly accelerate, that of my sister." His inveterate practice of improving individuals and the world was the cause of it all. Later "her letters became more and more [gloomy]. At length one assumed a tone of such despair as induced me to quit Wales precipitately... she had become violently attached to *me*, and feared I should not return her attachment.... It was impossible to avoid being much affected. I promised to unite my fate with hers." There is no reason to question the sincerity or accuracy of



this statement. If it is necessary to weigh Shelley's moral delinquency in his later desertion of Harriet, this letter has its place in the reckoning.

On November 6, writing from Keswick, Shelley addresses Hogg in a manner and tone inexplicable until the facts behind them are known. "You were surprised at our sudden departure; I have no time, however, *now*, either to account for it or enter into the investigation which we agreed upon. . . . With real, true interest, I constantly think of you, believe me, my friend, so sincerely am I attached to you. I can never forget you." Despite the protestation of friendship the letter unmistakably is a letter of farewell, as, in a spiritual sense, it was. Hogg, his dearest friend, "that noble being," as he had shortly before characterized him to Elizabeth Hitchener, had seized the occasion of Shelley's absence in London to attempt the seduction of Harriet who had been left in his care. It could, he pointed out, cause nobody any harm, for Shelley need not know. Harriet was of a different opinion. In his letter of November 8 to Elizabeth Hitchener, Shelley reveals the wound which the perfidy of his friend caused him: "You know how I have described *Hogg*, my enthusiasm in his defence, my love for him. . . . I have resolved because I am your friend to make you the depository of a secret. . . . Hogg is a mistaken man—vilely, dreadfully mistaken. . . . That he whom my fond expectations had pictured the champion of virtue, the enemy of prejudice, should himself become the meanest slave of the most contemptible of prejudices, is indeed dreadful. . . . You know the implicit faith I had in him, the unalterableness of my attachment. . . . Can you then conceive that he would have attempted to *seduce my wife*? that he should have chosen the very time for this attempt when I most confided in him, when least I doubted him?—Yet when did I *ever* doubt him?" There is more that speaks eloquently of the hurt which Shelley had suffered in his friend's treachery. It is more than personal. Hogg is another victim of the world's false standards: "Is he dead, cold, gone, annihilated? None, none of these! therefore *not* irretrievable. . . . I told him that I pardoned him freely, fully completely pardoned, that not the least anger possessed me. His vices and not himself were the objects of my horror and my hatred. . . . I engaged him to promise to write to me." At a subsequent time a semblance of the old intimacy was restored but never true friendship. That had gone with Shelley's youth.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Keswick and Ireland: Disillusionment*



¶ IT is truer of Shelley than of most that time for him is measurable not in months but in intellectual and emotional experience, that in his thirty years he lived more, both in heart and mind, than the average of mankind in eighty. ¶ To say that Hogg's defection signalizes the end of Shelley's youth is not, of course, wholly true, for youthfulness is a mood and Shelley was to know youthful moods again. Yet Shelley's emotional experience at the time he settled in Keswick for the autumn and early winter of 1811-1812 was considerable. His family relations were definitely broken. He was to have no other than formal relations ever again with father, mother, or sisters. By his marriage he had made himself an outcast to them. Had he not married Harriet but made her his mistress the breach need have been but temporary. It was an admirable object lesson in the caste morality of his world. Intellectually he had known this since first he began to imbibe radical ideas, but emotional experience had now given reality to knowledge. He had experienced, also in his own person, the savage antagonism of prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry. ¶ He had observed that friends to political liberty and advocates of freedom of thought and speech were persecuted ruthlessly by those in authority. ¶ He had learned personal treachery in the person of his dearest friend. The world had proved, in short, to be quite as evil a place as depicted by the best authors, ancient and modern. He was not, however, yet ready for cynicism and misanthropy. Some of these same authors taught that the world could be made to see the error of its ways. ¶ Through reason it could be converted to justice, tolerance, the repudiation of power and wealth. Surely, if men were reasonable beings, these truths need only be brought eloquently to their attention. That they had been preached vainly for two thousand years was not to deter another enthusiast from his attempt. ¶ In Keswick he dedicated himself to the effort, began his correspondence with Godwin, and prepared himself for the task to which he had set himself, the conversion of Ireland to the ways of sanity and peace. ¶

Shelley settled upon the Lake District for his next residence. It was near at hand, its scenery beautiful, and it offered opportunity to meet Southey, whose poetry he admired and whose revolutionary

sentiments of an earlier period he shared. The letters of this time are mostly to Hogg, Elizabeth Hitchener, and Godwin. To Hogg he writes in November: "I stand alone. I feel that I am nothing: a speck in an universe! All this is true: yet have I not been wretched, and was my wretchedness less keen, because it was undeserved? *Was* it undeserved? What is desert? . . . I have ever esteemed you as a superior being. . . . We shall meet again soon; but I must live some little time, I fear, by myself. . . . Oh! what a spot is this! Here nature has exhausted the profusion of her loveliness! Will *you* come; will you share my fortunes, enter into my schemes, love me as I love you, be inseparable, as once I fondly hoped we were? This is not all past, like a dream of the sick man, which leaves but bitterness—a fleeting vision. Oh! how I have loved you! I was even ashamed to tell you how! And now to leave you for a long time! No; not for a *long* time. Night comes; Death comes! Cold, calm Death. Almost I would it were to-morrow. There is another life—are you not to be the first there? Assuredly, dearest, dearest friend. Reason with me still; I am like a child in weakness." Hogg in later years, after calm Death had come to his friend, writes of this and other letters of similar tenor: "Bysshe's letters will speak for themselves, in a tone of vague and mysterious despondency." Unfortunately the despondency of many of the letters was not sufficiently vague. It descended to names and particulars. Hogg as a biographer, confronted with the problem of these damning letters, employs an ingenious device. He discovered, he says, among Shelley's papers "one morsel, it appears, to relate to the amplification of Werter." In this morsel Harriet becomes Charlotte and the letter constituting the true story was, as Hogg supposed, thus skillfully disguised. Were the falsification to be accepted, Shelley would appear as Hogg endeavored to depict him, "fugitive, volatile . . . a lovely, a graceful image, but fading, vanishing speedily from our sight . . . he must be tied up fast to something of a firmer texture, harder and more rigid than his own, pliant yielding structure; to some person of a less flexible formation: he always required a prop." Hogg, presumably.

It is Hogg and the reflections prompted by Hogg's faithlessness which monopolize Shelley's first letters from Keswick to Elizabeth Hitchener.<sup>1</sup> Even his strongest faculty, the philosophic, is, for a while, dazed: "Friend of my soul this is terrible, dismaying; it makes one's heart sink, it withers vital energy. Had a common man done so, 'twould have been but a common event, but a common mistake. Now! if for a moment the soul forgets (as at times it will) that it

must enshrine the body for others, how beautiful does death appear, what a release from the crimes and miseries of mortality!" He expatiates on what love means to him, distinguishing between sensual and spiritual love; "The one is a love which is self-centered, self-devoted, self-interested: it desires its *own* interest: it is the parent of jealousy. Its object is the plaything which it desires to monopolize. Selfishness, monopoly, is its very soul; and to communicate to others part of this love were to destroy its essence, to annihilate this chain of straw.—But Love, the Love which *we* worship,—Virtue, Heaven, disinterestedness—in a word. Friendship, which has as much to do with the senses as with yonder mountains, that which seeks the good of all, the good of its object first, not because that object is a minister to its pleasures, not merely because it even contributes to its happiness, but because it is really worthy, because it has powers, sensibilities, is capable of abstracting self, and loving virtue for virtue's own loveliness, desiring the happiness of others *not* from the obligation of fearing hell or desiring Heaven, but for pure simple unsophisticated Virtue." A love so intellectual, the Uranian Venus, Shelley many times depicted in his verse. It is identical with the intellectual beauty which he unceasingly celebrates. But he was to find very little of it in Elizabeth Hitchener or in any other fallible mortal. It remained for him to the last an ideal unattainable on this earth. The lack of it made him impatient for death.

The letters to Hogg and to Miss Hitchener in the six weeks after Shelley's removal to Keswick depict his grief at his friend's betrayal, his hope that his friend's repentance is genuine, that their friendship may be restored; and last his feeling that Hogg is not genuinely contrite but is self-deceived. He writes to Miss Hitchener, November 24: "I am discouraged. His letters of late appear to me to betray *cunning*, deep cunning. But I may be deceived: oh! that I were in all that these five weeks have brought forth— His letters are long, but they never express any conviction or unison, they appear merely calculated to bring about what he calls 'intimacy on the same happy terms as formerly.'" In December he (supposedly) wrote the letter which Hogg pretended was a fragment of an unpublished novel, the "Werter letter." Hogg would have been manlier far than he was and more genuinely repentant had he at a later date published the letter unaltered. He might better even have suppressed it, but to alter it and disguise its true character was characteristic of the cunning which Shelley had perceived in him. Shelley was of a trusting disposition, only too ready to believe everything good of those he

loved, but once undeceived he read character acutely. It was so at a later date of Byron and Godwin. His letter to Hogg in response to Hogg's threat to kill himself unless Harriet should forgive him is lucid, cold, and despite a protestation of friendship unwittingly contemptuous. Hogg must still have felt the sting of it after years and had his revenge in the *Life of Shelley*. A few sentences will suffice to reveal its quality: "It convinces me more forcibly than ever how unfit it is that you should live near us... your passions impose upon your reason, if this is not evident to your apprehension.... How terrible, how complete has been the perversion of that reason I once almost fancied omnipotent!... I said you were insincere.... It appears to me that I am acting as your friend—your disinterested friend—by objecting to your living near us at present. Certainly, I am depriving myself of the very great pleasure of your society.... You are, you shall be my bosom friend. You have been so but in one instance, and there you have deceived yourself.... Oh! how the sophistry of the passions has changed you!... Assert yourself, be what you were.... Love is not a whirlwind, that it is unvanquishable!"

Perhaps Shelley would not have written that last sentence three years later when he had met and fallen in love with Mary Godwin. His letter to Hogg, just as it essentially is, betrays his own ignorance of deep passion whether base, as he thought Hogg's to be, or exalted. Hogg was probably incapable of an unselfish love, but the desire he felt for Harriet may nevertheless have caused him deep agony. This, Shelley intellectually perceived but was essentially incapable emotionally of sharing. It was a tragic episode in the lives of both; from Shelley it took some of his too scanty trust in life; for Hogg it meant the end of a friendship which was the best thing he was ever to know, his sole claim to greatness. He was for a short time to see his friend again and be restored to a kind of intimacy. It was little more than a gesture. The old confidence and trust were gone forever.

The letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, Hogg no longer being his confidant, are the chief repository, at this period, of Shelley's speculations. He endeavors for her and for himself "not *quite* [to] despair of human nature. Our conceptions are scarcely vivid enough to picture the degree of crime, of degradation, which sullies human society—but what words are equal to express their inadequacy to picture its hidden virtue?" She seemingly had found comfort in religion: "But, for this purpose, the religion of the Deist, or the worshipper of virtue would suffice, without involving the persecution, battles, bloodshed,

which countenancing Christianity countenances." Reason is still his God: "I say passion is referable to reason, but I mean the great aspiring passions of disinterested Friendship, Philanthropy." The problem of immortality still plagues him. To its solution reason is insufficient. "With you, I cannot submit to perish like the flower of the field." And again in a later letter (November 24): "So much for real [? false] and so much for true love. The one perishes with the body whence on earth it never dares to soar, the other lives with the soul which was the exclusive object of its homage. Oh if this last be but true. You talk of a future state: 'is not this imagination,' you ask, 'a proof of it?' To me it appears so: to me everything proves it. But what we earnestly desire we are very much prejudiced in favor of. It seems to me that everything lives again. What is the Soul? Look at yonder flower. The blast of the North sweeps it from the earth; it withers beneath the breath of the destroyer. Yet that flower hath a soul: for what is soul but that which makes an organized being to be what it is,—without which it would not be so? On this hypothesis must not *that* (the soul) without which a flower cannot be a flower *exist*, when the earthly flower hath perished? Yet where does it exist, in what state of being? ... I will say, then, that all Nature is animated, that microscopic vision, as it hath discovered to us millions of animated beings whose pursuits and passions are as eagerly followed as our own; so might it, if extended, find that Nature itself was but a mass of organized animation... perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode... On this plan, *congenial* souls must meet. ... Free-will must give energy to this infinite mass of being and thereby constitute virtue. If *our* change be in this mortal life, do not fear that we shall be among the grovelling souls of heroes, aristocrats, and commercialists."

An incident of some significance is recorded in a letter of November 26 to Miss Hitchener: "Strange prejudices have these country people! I must relate one very singular one. The other night I was explaining to Harriet and Eliza the nature of the atmosphere, and, to illustrate my theory, I made some experiments on hydrogen gas, one of its constituent parts. This was in the garden, and the vivid flame was seen at some distance. A few days later, Mr. Dare entered our cottage, and said he had something to say to me... 'Why, sir?' 'Because the country talks very strangely of your proceedings. Odd things have been seen at night near your dwelling. I am very ill satisfied with this. Sir, I don't like to talk of it: I wish you to provide your-

self elsewhere.' I have, with much difficulty, quieted Mr. D.'s fears." Wordsworth's country neighbors seem not to have experienced a sufficient number of the impulses from the vernal wood. Or perhaps they shared Wordsworth's disapprobation of science. Wordsworth and Shelley did not meet. Perhaps it was just as well, for Southey disappointed him sufficiently.

"Southey lives at Keswick. I have been contemplating the outside of his house." So Shelley writes on November 12. Again, a few days later he speaks of him as "the object most interesting to my feelings" in the neighborhood despite the glory of the scenery which "is awfully beautiful." On November 23, "I have not seen Southey: he is not now at Keswick. Believe that on his return I will not be slow to pay homage to a *really* great man." Shelley was yet to be cured of his passion for hero-worshiping. Southey was to be his first object lesson of the work transcending the man. For *The Curse of Kehama* and other poems Shelley had a great admiration and their influence is apparent in *Queen Mab* and elsewhere. Indeed though Shelley's own technic in verse was vastly to transcend Southey's, the influence of imagery and scene, and a certain epic amplitude, which Southey at his best attains, is evident even in so masterly and mature a work as *Prometheus Unbound*! But it was the Southey of *Wat Tyler* and *Joan of Arc*, Southey the radical who, at college, had worn his hair unpowdered as evidence of republican sympathies, that Shelley yearned to meet. That young radical was now as dead as most of his works have subsequently become. The realization came to Shelley as another disillusionment in a world to which he woke daily only to find "the truth worse than his visions were.")

He was not ignorant of Southey's apostasy from the revolutionary cause, was to some degree prepared, but expected upon meeting him, "to reproach him for his tergiversation.—He to whom Bigotry, Tyranny, Law was [*sic*] hateful, has become the votary of these idols in a form the most disgusting.—The Church of England, its Hell and all, has become the subject of his panegyric, the war in Spain, that prodigal waste of human blood to aggrandize the fame of statesmen, is his delight, The Constitution of England—with its Wellesley, its Paget, and its Prince—are inflated with the prostituted exertions of his Pen. I feel a sickening distrust when I see all that I had considered good, great, or imitable, fall around me into the gulf of error. But we will struggle on its brink to the last. . . ." On December 26 he writes that he has "been engaged in talking with Southey," whom he regards as "great and worthy" despite his "total difference from my

sentiments. "Southey Shelley found to be a perfectibilian and "an advocate of liberty and equality." He looked forward to a time when matter should "become subjected to the omnipotence of mind, but he is now an advocate for existing establishments. . . . Southey hates the Irish, he speaks against Catholic Emancipation, and Parliamentary reform. In all these things we differ, and our differences were the subjects of a long conversation." Southey called himself a Christian but Shelley thought him to be in reality a Deist, thus hopefully straining every possibility in behalf of his hero. He adds as though to reassure himself, "Southey, though far from being a man of great reasoning powers, is a great Man."

Subsequent conversations lowered this opinion: "I do not think so highly of Southey as I did. It is to be confessed that to see him in his family, to behold him in his domestic circle, he appears in a most amiable light.—I do not mean that he is or can be the great character which once I linked him to. His mind is terribly narrow, compared to it. *Once* he *was* this character,—everything you can conceive of practised virtue.—Now he is corrupted by the world, contaminated by Custom: it rends my heart when I think what he might have been!" The conversations with Southey turned on deep matters which "elicited my true opinions of God. He says I ought not to call myself an atheist, since in reality I believe that the universe is God. I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the Universe. I then explain:—I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that life is infinite; that as the soul which now animates this frame was once the vivifying principle of the *infinitely* lowest link in the Chain of existence, so is it ultimately destined to attain the highest . . . that everything is animation . . . and in consequence being infinite we can never arrive at its termination. . . . Southey agrees in my idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence. . . . I, you, and he are constituent parts of this immeasurable whole." Also, "Southey is no believer in original sin: he thinks that which appears to be a taint of our nature is in effect the result of unnatural political institutions: there we agree. He thinks the prejudices of education, and sinister influences of political institutions, adequate to account for all the specimens of vice which have fallen within his observation," Southey saw in Shelley one "who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. . . . He is come to the fittest physician in the world. At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of philosophy, and in the course of a week I expect he will be a Berkeleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley. It has



surprised him a good deal to meet, for the first time in his life, with a man who perfectly understands him, and does him full justice. I tell him that all the difference between us is that he is nineteen and I am thirty-seven; and I dare say it will not be very long before I shall succeed in convincing him that he may be a true philosopher, and do a great deal of good, with £6000 a year, the thought of which troubles him a great deal more at present than ever the want of sixpence (for I have known such a want) did me. . . . God help us! The world wants mending, though he did not set about it exactly in the right way." Shelley did not think highly of Southey's argument from experience: "Southey says Expediency ought to [be] made the ground of politics but not of morals. I urged that the most fatal error that ever happened in the world was the separation of political and ethical science. . . . Southey did not think the reasoning conclusive, he has a very happy knack when truth goes against him, of saying: 'Oh! when you are as old as I am, you will think with me.'"

Letters to Godwin, preluding their later intimacy and its fateful consequences, confer upon the Keswick period its significance in Shelley's intellectual history. Shelley writes, January 3, 1812, in rather a high formal strain. He apologizes for the liberty he takes in addressing one personally unknown to him but "the dearest interests of mankind imperiously demand that a certain etiquette of fashion should no longer keep 'man at a distance from man,' or impose its flimsy fancies between the free communication of intellect." He continues, "The name of Godwin has been used to excite in me feelings of reverence and admiration. I have been accustomed to consider him a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him." These and similar phrases must have fallen flatteringly upon the ear of an elderly philosopher without disciples and in continuous financial difficulties. Less flattering, with its implication of his present insignificance to the world, was Shelley's expression of his joy upon learning that Godwin still lived: "I had enrolled your name in the list of the honorable dead. I had felt regret that the glory of your being had passed from this earth of ours. It is not so, you still live, and, I firmly believe, are still planning the welfare of human kind." Shelley states that he has "but just entered on the scene of human operations; yet my feelings and my reasonings correspond with what yours were." He has, he says, "seen much of human prejudice, suffered much from human persecution." He is "ardent in the cause of philanthropy and truth." In short, as a raw recruit, he asks the friendly guidance of one who, "I doubt not [is] a veteran to me in the years of persecu-

tion." It was like a voice from the past, from the tomb. Godwin could only have supposed the perfectibilians a race extinct, those who had escaped the prosecutions of Ellenborough and Castlereagh perverted by the sophistries of Malthus. The letter excited his curiosity. He responded with a demand for particulars.

Shelley (January 10) proceeded "to remedy the fault" and supply the particulars desired. "I am the son of a man of fortune in Sussex. The habits of thinking of my father and myself never coincided. Passive obedience was inculcated and enforced in my childhood. I was required to love, because it was *my duty* to love." Such an effort naturally defeated its own ends. Shelley then proceeds to outline his boyish interests: "Ancient books of Chemistry and Magic were perused with an enthusiasm of wonder, almost amounting to belief." He was a reader and then a writer of romances—whose titles he mentions. "It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book on 'Political Justice'; it opened to my mind fresh and more extensive views; it materially influenced my character, and I rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man. I was no longer the votary of romance; till then I had existed in an ideal world—now I found that in this universe of ours was enough to excite the interest of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of reason; I beheld, in short, that I had duties to perform." "It is a somewhat pompous avowal of his dedication to the cause of social reform. Godwin, not knowing the young man, would be pardoned for doubting either his sincerity or his practical common sense. It was a bad time for reformers. But Shelley's further confession that he was "heir by entail to an estate of £6000 per annum" was sufficient to interest an impecunious theorist whose financial condition was chronically unsound. Godwin's motives may have been honorable, a desire, perhaps, to keep the young man from losing his six thousand a year, of which his father was seeking to deprive him. It is regrettable, if so, that his subsequent conduct in fastening upon his admirer and bleeding him white raises a doubt as to his disinterestedness at any time.

Godwin's answer must have been by return mail, for Shelley's rejoinder is dated January 16. "That so prompt and so kind an answer should have relieved my mind I had scarcely dared to hope . . . that he, as a man, should be my friend and my adviser, the moderator of my enthusiasm . . . all this was more than I dared to trust myself to hope. . . ." Godwin had expressed a "deep and earnest interest" in his welfare. Other passages suggest that Godwin had cautioned him against further antagonizing his father: hence the phrase, rather

ominous, "moderator of my enthusiasm." He is not, he says, angry with his father but, "I never loved my father—it was not from hardness of heart, for I have loved and do love warmly." Godwin had further sought to temper his enthusiasm for propaganda, that "being yet a scholar," he ought to have "no intolerable itch to become a teacher." And here, it must be admitted, that Godwin's advice was worldly-wise and sound for all but the thousandth young man, which Shelley was. Godwin could not yet know that he had a very rare bird in hand, a young man of genius, born rebel, reformer, and propagandist yet heir to a country squire with six thousand a year. It was an improbable combination. Shelley was dedicated to martyrdom and was probably lucky to have suffered no more at the hands of society than he did. He at least escaped imprisonment and hanging. Perhaps it was because he was no demagogue despite his radicalism, or because he disbelieved in violence and bloodshed as a way to revolution. He had renounced Christianity and its founder, yet he nevertheless accepted even in youth the Sermon on the Mount. He says in this same letter, "I do not set up for a judge of controversies, but into whatever company I go I have introduced my own sentiments, partly with a view, if they were anywise erroneous, that unforeseen elucidations might rectify them. . . . I hope in the course of our communication, to acquire that sobriety of spirit which is the characteristic of true heroism. I have not heard, without benefit, that Newton was a modest man. . . . But I think there is a line to be drawn between affectation of unpossessed talents and the deceit of self-distrust, by which much power has been lost to the world. . . . In a few days we set off to Dublin. . . . Our journey has been settled some time. We go principally to *forward as much as we can* the Catholic Emancipation."

[To Elizabeth Hitchener (January 20) Shelley expresses his delight that Godwin is to be his friend: "He remains unchanged. I have no soul-chilling alteration to record of his character, the unmoderated enthusiasm of humanity still characterizes him. . . . The age of the body has [not] induced the age of the soul." Of Southey, Shelley confesses, he no longer has a good opinion and quotes a bit of patriotic verbiage in which Southey commends people, "'who, in duly appreciating his transcendent virtues, prove themselves deserving the best Monarch that ever adorned a throne.'" Presumably George III is meant. Shelley comments, "Now what think you of this? I can only exclaim with Bolingbroke, 'Poor human nature!'" He continues, "I hasten to go to Ireland, I am now writing an 'Address' to the poor Irish Catholics." He proceeds to quote parts of the projected address

and promises she shall "see the pamphlet when it comes out: it will be cheaply printed, and printed in large sheets to be stuck about the walls of Dublin." The "Address," to be printed cheaply, "I shall distribute throughout Ireland, either personally or by means of booksellers." He concludes with some stanzas from the poem later printed as a broadside entitled "The Devil's Walk," a not particularly original conception in which the Devil, walking abroad, views with approval the work of his earthly agents, parsons, lawyers, and a "brainless king." In appearance the Devil is likened to Castlereagh, loathed by Byron and Shelley and all of liberal beliefs. Shelley appends a postscript: "You have said no more of the immortality of the soul. Do you not believe it? I do; but I cannot tell you why in a letter—at least, not clearly." It was, seemingly, one of his believing days.

YThe "Address to the Irish" was evidently prepared with the utmost care. Shelley writes to Miss Hitchener (January 26) that "It is intended to familiarize to uneducated apprehensions ideas of liberty, benevolence, *peace*, and toleration. It is *secretly* intended also as a preliminary to other pamphlets to shake Catholicism on its basis, and to induce Quakerish and Socinian principles of politics, without objecting to the Christian religion, which would be no good to the vulgar just now, and cast an odium over the other principles which are advanced." } (To Godwin (January 28) he writes: "I can by no means admit that it contains one sentiment which *can* harm the cause of liberty and happiness. It consists of the benevolent and tolerant deductions of philosophy reduced into the simplest language, and such as those who by their uneducated poverty are most susceptible of evil impressions from Catholicism may clearly comprehend. I know it can do no harm; it cannot excite rebellion, as its main principle is to trust the success of a cause to the energy of its truth... it owns no religion but benevolence, no cause but virtue, no party but the world. I shall devote myself with unremitting zeal, as far as an uncertain state of health will permit, towards forwarding the great ends of virtue and happiness in Ireland, regarding as I do the present state of that country's affairs as an opportunity which if I, being thus disengaged, permit to pass unoccupied, I am unworthy of the character which I have assumed." To Elizabeth Hitchener (January 29) he writes, "Come, come to Ireland... Come, come, and share with us the noblest success, or the most glorious martyrdom." Miss Hitchener did not avail herself of the opportunity.

The Shelleys arrived in Dublin February 12, 1812, after a tem-

pestuous voyage. Shelley's letter of February 14 to Miss Hitchener is in an elevated strain. That she should come to Ireland in winter he now perceives is not feasible. But in the summer she is to join them in Wales "*and never part again.*" He apostrophizes the ocean and Erin. The lines of Erasmus Darwin are in the back of his mind, for he speaks of "Yon monarch in his solitary pomp is but the fungus of a winter day," a figure which he employs also in *Queen Mab*. A new republic has been set up in Mexico and he encloses verses upon that happy event, beginning,

Brothers! between you and me,  
Whirlwinds sweep and billows roar:

The slaves "crouching at Corruption's throne" are bid arise. He apostrophizes Cotopaxi; perhaps that intriguing name provoked the poem. He also addresses a brief poem to Ireland:

Bear witness, Erin, when thine injured isle . . .

"On these topics," he remarks, "I find that I sometimes can write poetry when I feel—such as it is." He had also, he informs his correspondent, presented a letter of introduction from Godwin to Curran, the Irish patriot, who was "not at home." Curran remained not at home for some time. It is probable that he was suspicious of any of Godwin's friends, for Godwin, as Mac-Carthy in *Shelley's Early Life* is at pains to prove, sought to borrow money of him.

The *Address to the Irish People* was advertised in *The Dublin Evening Post* of February 25, 1812, as that day published, price five-pence. The advertisement reads as follows:

"The lowest possible price is set on this publication, because it is the intention of the Author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state, and suggesting rational means of remedy.—Catholic Emancipation, and a Repeal of the Union Act, (the latter, the most successful engine that England ever wielded over the misery of fallen Ireland,) being treated of in the following address, as grievances which unanimity and resolution may remove, and associations conducted with peaceable firmness, being earnestly recommended, as means for embodying that unanimity and firmness, which must finally be successful."

It was this pamphlet which Shelley threw from the balcony of his lodgings: "I stand at the balcony of our window, and watch till I see a man *who looks likely*—I throw a book to him." Harriet wrote

Miss Hitchener: "I'm sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of the window, and give them to men that we pass in the streets. For myself I am ready to die of laughter when it is done, and Percy looks so grave, yesterday he put one into a woman's hood of a cloak. She knew nothing of it, and we passed her. I could hardly get on, my muscles were so irritated." Shelley had a naïve—or it may be mystical—belief in the contagious properties of ideas.<sup>1</sup> He was himself singularly hospitable to them and imagined that others were likewise susceptible. A little later he endeavored to disseminate them by means of toy balloons and by corked bottles containing pamphlets cast into the sea. It is from such a belief and practice that spring the lines:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

. . . . .

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

¶ The *Address* is the first of Shelley's works, prose or verse, of much importance in his mental history, and this not so much that it is original, for it is mainly derived, but in the character of its ideas, the maturity of its expression, and, most, for the spirit in which it is composed. ¶ That Shelley was but nineteen when he wrote it, the reader should forget, as he should forget Hogg's effort to ridicule the whole Irish enterprise. If the *Address* and Shelley's purpose in it are absurd, then Shelley is absurd, and readers of him should content themselves with the melody of his lines and the colorful pictures of aerial phenomena which are characteristic of his verse. ¶ Shelley was deadly serious in his efforts to win the Irish people to the spirit of reform. The ideas which he expounds he had made his own by his passionate belief in them. They are ideas which were never held but by a minority at any time and are scarcely more popular now than in Shelley's day. Shelley nevertheless believed them in youth and, in essentials, held to them throughout his lifetime, though the longer he knew mankind the less confidence he had that ideas so self-evident for human welfare would be widely believed.)

In his introductory paragraph Shelley appeals to his audience not to reject his address because he is an Englishman. All who are unfortunate are his brothers, nor does the accident of nationality alter a man's character, make him better or worse than he really is. The Englishmen who revile the Irish do so not because they are English

but because they have selfish ends to serve: "they wish to get money, titles, and power." Nor should his readers be deceived and think from the title of the piece "that it may recommend violent measures, and thereby disgrace the cause of freedom..." The warm feelings characteristic of the Irish it is "not [his] desire to root out, but to moderate..." He wishes to fill his readers with that moderation which their enemies have not, to make them grant to others the moderation denied themselves. Upon the merits of Catholicism among religions he does not intend to speak. "All religions are good which make men good." He is himself neither Protestant nor Catholic. Both Protestant and Catholic are his brothers.

As Roman Catholics once persecuted Protestants, so now Protestants persecute Roman Catholics; "the Irish Catholics are badly used." They "now demand for themselves, and profess for others unlimited toleration, and the sensible part among them... know that the gates of Heaven are open to people of every religion, provided they are good." It is true, as the Protestants charge, that at one time the "Roman Catholics burnt and murdered people of different sentiments." It does not follow that the Catholics now are barbarous. He enumerates instances of barbarity in the medieval church, and speaks of "bigotted Monks" and the "vices of Monks and Nuns in their Convents." The priests indeed "shamefully imposed upon the people" and "became more powerful than Kings, Princes, Dukes, Lords, or Ministers: this power made them bad men." People who are good in their natural state are made bad by despotic power. But the Catholic of today no longer credits the superstitions of the past. He no longer believes that all but those of his own faith are heretics destined to destruction. If he should do so and trust only priests he will not achieve liberty but only a worse bondage than he now knows. Instead of his present oppressors he will suffer under others who are worse. "Can there be worse slavery than the depending for the safety of your soul on the will of another man? ... God values a poor man as much as a Priest." Good works, not ceremonials, constitute the true worship of God. "Think of the word 'heretic' as a word which some selfish knave invented for the ruin and misery of the world, to answer his own paltry and narrow ambition."

What of the Protestant religion? It began with a so-called Reformation in which "some bigotted men... showed how little they understood the spirit of Reform, by burning each other." Do not the Protestants hold the same beliefs they did then? "They swear that they do." How then can Protestants object to Catholic Emancipation

"on the plea that Catholics once were barbarous?" Why may not every religion, every form of thinking, be tolerated? But "it is not a merit to tolerate... it is a crime to be intolerant." Nor is wrong created by government decree. The right of Catholics to representation in government remains though its exercise is prevented. "But force is not the test of truth; they will never have recourse to violence who acknowledge no other rule of behaviour but virtue and justice." To persecute men for their religion is foolish, for we cannot by force make men believe. We can believe "only what we think to be true." Our convictions can not be altered by violence but only by persuasion. "Anything short of unlimited toleration, and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect that Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong." Before religions were, men knew liberty and happiness in so far as they were wise and good. And to make men wise and good is the only use of religion. Men can be good and hold sentiments different from ours: "People of all religions ought to have an equal share in the state." Let all seek heaven in their own way. The intolerance of the past need no longer persist. Knowledge has grown "and the more thought there is in the world, the more happiness and liberty will there be." He declares: "I propose unlimited toleration, or rather the destruction, both of toleration and intolerance... it is not because you are Irishmen or Roman Catholics, that I feel with you and feel for you; but because you are men and sufferers." The Irish have suffered not merely for their religion but by reason of the Union Act which has withdrawn the Protestant aristocracy from the country and "the very poor people are most infamously oppressed by the weight of burden which the superior ranks lay upon their shoulders. I am no less desirous of the reform of these evils (with many others) than for the Catholic Emancipation."

If his readers agree with him that the Union Act is harmful and Catholic Emancipation desirable "we now come to the method of doing these things." He is in accord "with the Quakers so far as they disclaim violence." If the Irish are convinced of the truth of their cause let them trust to its truth: "In no case employ violence." The way to defeat the cause is for the injured party to resort to the methods of their oppressors. He exhorts them to "be calm, mild, deliberate, patient." They should "think and talk, and discuss." Their object is happiness and liberty; to attain these they must "first be wise and good." They must avoid associations for violence and abjure secret meetings and hidden arms. "Never do evil that good



may come, always think of others as well as yourself." The French Revolution, he points out, "although undertaken with the best intentions, ended ill for the people." The reason? "Because violence was employed." The Irish must resist oppression "by power of mind." Persecution can destroy only a few. Let the Irish cultivate habits of "sobriety, regularity, and thought." They should save the money with which they "purchase drunkenness and ill-health" and with it aid their fellow-sufferers. To resort to rebellion will be to fasten the chains more tightly upon themselves and do injury rather than benefit to their children.

The Prince of Wales, soon to inherit the throne, has promised freedom to the Irish but his advisers are not, like Charles Fox, lovers of liberty. "Depend then, not upon the promises of Princes, but upon those of virtuous and disinterested men." Only "the increase of virtue and wisdom" it is, "which will lead people to find out that force and oppression are wrong and false." The government will be hostile to them but the government is by no means the English people. "The sense of the English and of their Governors is opposite." There will be an end of this division, for "the goodness of a Government consists in the happiness of the Governed." The reform of the English government will then "produce good to the Irish." For this day, which is approaching, the Irish must prepare themselves, must "think, read and talk." They should not play or drink. "Temperance, sobriety, charity and independence will give you virtue; and reading, talking, thinking and searching, will give you wisdom; when you have those things you may defy the tyrant." And above all the Irish must beware of quarrelling among themselves. If they are to win sympathy for their cause they should "give no offence."

The Catholic Emancipation is certain if the Irish will but forbear from violence and intolerance among themselves. So, too, will other wrongs be done away. These are but immediate ends. Beyond lies the prospect of a better world: "There is no doubt but that the world is going wrong, or rather that it is very capable of being much improved." There should be "a more equal and general diffusion of happiness and liberty." Neither the very rich nor the very poor in our society are happy. "Nature never intended that there should be such a thing as a poor man or a rich man. . . . Government is an evil, it is only the thoughtlessness and vices of men that make it a necessary evil. When all men are good and wise, Government will of itself decay." Therefore the necessity of individual reform before social and political evils can be banished. "It delights me to see that

men begin to think and to act for the good of others." The Catholic Emancipation is but a step on the road to greater reform. "But I cannot expect a rapid change. . . . I do not wish to see things changed now, because it cannot be done without violence." In a happy state of society there would be complete social equality; also economic equality—no poor and no rich. "No lover would then be false to his mistress, no mistress would desert her lover. No friend would play false, no rents, no debts, no taxes, no frauds of any kind would disturb the general happiness. . . . No beggars would exist, nor any of those wretched women, who are now reduced to a state of the most horrible misery and vice, by men whose wealth makes them villainous and hardened. No thieves or murderers. . . ." Christ meant by his parable of the camel and the rich man "that riches, have generally the effect of hardening and vitiating the heart." But so too has poverty. "People say that poverty is no evil—they have never felt it, or they would not think so." Wealth, it is believed, fosters the arts, but free and happy men are more to be desired than pictures and statues.

"Let poor men still continue to work." Knowledge of their condition cannot be hid from them but, "The public communication of this truth ought, in no manner, to impede the established usages of society." It is necessary that public opinion be educated. "Reform ought to begin at home . . . conversation and reading are the principal and chief methods of awakening the mind to knowledge and goodness." Yet "To begin to reform the Government, is immediately necessary . . . as political institution has even [ever?] the greatest influence on the human character." Catholic Emancipation is but a step towards universal emancipation, one of the reforms "preparatory to the great and lasting one which shall bring about the peace, the harmony, and the happiness of Ireland, England, Europe, the World." The discussion preparatory to reform and the creation of public opinion is not permitted by government if associations "assemble for that express purpose." Yet have not human beings the "right to assemble to talk upon what subject they please?" Surely assembling for discussion cannot "come in any way under the head of force or violence." If you are free men and not slaves, then quietly resist. "When one cheek is struck, turn the other to the insulting coward. . . . The discussion of any subject, is a right that you have brought into the world with your heart and tongue. . . . For it is fit that the governed should enquire into the proceedings of Government. . . . You have much to think of.—Is war necessary to your happiness and safety? The interests of the poor gain nothing from the wealth or

extension of a nation's boundaries, they gain nothing from glory, a word that has often served as a cloak to the ambition or avarice of Statesmen. . . . The poor purchase this glory and this wealth, at the expence of their blood, and labor, and happiness, and virtue. They die in battle for this infernal cause.

"It is horrible that the lower classes must waste their lives and liberty to furnish means for their oppressors to oppress them yet more terribly. It is horrible that the poor must give in taxes what would save them and their families from hunger and cold . . . what words can express the enormity of the abuse that prevents them from choosing representatives with authority to enquire into the manner in which their lives and labor, their happiness and innocence is expended. . . . There is an outcry raised against amendment; it is called innovation and condemned by many unthinking people who have a good fire and plenty to eat and drink; hard hearted or thoughtless beings how many are famishing whilst you deliberate, how many perish to contribute to your pleasures." The object of associations should be the amendment of these abuses. "There is yet another subject, 'The Liberty of the Press.'" This though guaranteed by law does not exist: "There is no liberty of the press, for the subjects of British government. It is really ridiculous to hear people yet boasting of this inestimable blessing, when they daily see it successfully muzzled and outraged by the lawyers of the crown." Under an abuse of the law of libel men are imprisoned for statements about government officials which are wholly true but whose truth may not be advanced as sufficient justification. Mr. Finnerty, an Irishman, "is now confined in an English gaol. . . . He was imprisoned for persisting in the truth. His judge told him on his trial, that truth and falsehood were indifferent to the law, and that if he owned the publication any consideration, whether the facts that it related were well or ill-founded, was totally irrelevant. Such is the libel law. Such the Liberty of the Press."

In his summary and conclusion he asks, "Is any one inclined to dispute the possibility of a happy change in society? Do they say that the nature of man is corrupt, and that he was made for misery and wickedness?" But whether the belief be true or false are the means of melioration harmful? "I have recommended peace, philanthropy, wisdom. . . . The wisdom and charity of which I speak, are the *only* means which I will countenance, for the redress of your grievances, and the grievances of the world. So far as they operate, I am willing to stand responsible for their *evil* effects." In a postscript

he adds, as a means to the realization of these ends, that he "has determined . . . to propose, an association for the purposes of restoring Ireland to the prosperity which she possessed before the Union Act; and the religious freedom, which the involuntariness of faith, ought to have taught all monopolists of Heaven, long, long ago, that every-one had a right to possess." The postscript concludes with a quotation from Lafayette: "For a nation to love Liberty it is sufficient that she knows it, to be free it is sufficient that she wills it."

I have been at pains to summarize the *Address* thus extensively because of its intrinsic importance as an early expression of Shelley's political idealism and because relatively few persons have probably ever read it. Hogg's deliberate belittling of Shelley's Irish experiences and of all his political essays has helped to discredit Shelley as reformer and political thinker and discounted all his controversial prose. It can be flatly asserted that so to ignore Shelley's political thinking and writing or to belittle his attempts to put his ideas into practice is to fail to understand the man and to approach his later verse under a misapprehension. The development of Shelley's thought, of which the poetry of his mature years is a flowering, can be traced step by step. It is a logical and fascinating development. The perplexities and paradoxes manifest in his early letters, the political pamphlets, and *Queen Mab* are ultimately solved or reconciled. Attempts at practical reform he had by reason of circumstances to forego, but the Shelley of *A Philosophical View of Reform* is the Shelley of the *Irish Address*, as the Shelley of *Prometheus* is the Shelley who has found an answer to the metaphysical perplexities revealed in his early letters to Hogg and Elizabeth Hitchener. <sup>(1)</sup>

Many of the ideas in the *Address* are manifestly derived from Godwin. Godwin believed in peaceful, not violent revolution; believed, too, that freedom of speech and the press was necessary to all reform, and that public opinion was shaped through the instrumentality of small groups of people met for free discussion. Godwin was a perfectibilian like Shelley; society could be endlessly improved if men so desired; men are evil largely through circumstance and circumstance can be altered. In all this Shelley echoes Godwin but with a warmth and passion Godwin never knew. The *Address* is somewhat repetitious and diffuse because Shelley was not writing in his customary style but was addressing a popular audience. But the tone of it is passionately earnest. The somewhat academic anarchism of Godwin is vitalized with the spirit of Christ. Shelley was not so lost in the cloudland of his imaginings that he was unaware of the lives led

by the poor and the unfortunate. Despite his own comfortable upbringing and the luxuries enjoyed by the wealthy he had heart for the sufferings of the poor. He had imagination. In Keswick—the Wordsworth country—some of the comments in his letters bear witness to his observations of the misery around him: “I have beheld scenes of misery.—The manufacturers are reduced to starvation. My friends the military are gone to Nottingham. . . . Curses light on them for their motives, if they destroy one of its famine-wasted inhabitants.” And again: “. . . at this Keswick, though the face of the country is lovely, the *people* are detestable. The manufacturers with their contamination have crept into the peaceful vale, and deformed the loveliness of Nature with human taint. The debauched servants of the great families who resort contribute to the total extinction of morality. Keswick seems more like a suburb of London than a village of Cumberland. Children are frequently found in the river, which the unfortunate women employed in the manufactory destroy.”<sup>11</sup>

His brief residence in Dublin revealed even more of human suffering. Writing to Godwin on March 8 he observes: “I had no conception of the depth of human misery until now. The poor of Dublin are assuredly the meanest and most miserable of all. In their narrow streets thousands seem huddled together,—one mass of animated filth! With what eagerness do such scenes as these inspire me! How self confident, too, do I feel in my assumption to teach the lessons of virtue to those who grind their fellow beings into worse than annihilation. These were the persons to whom, in my fancy, I had addressed myself: how quickly were my views on this subject changed; yet how deeply has this very change rooted the conviction on which I came hither.” Two days later he writes to Elizabeth Hitchener: “I cannot recount all the horrible instances of unrestricted and unlimited tyranny that have met my ears,—scarcely those that have personally occurred to me! An Irishman has been torn from his wife and family in Lisbon, because he was an expatriate, and compelled to serve as a common soldier in the Portuguese army, by that monster of anti-patriotic inhumanity *Beresford*, the idol of the belligerents. You will soon see a copy of his letter, and soon hear of my or Sir F. Burdett’s exertions in his favor. He *shall* be free. This nation shall awaken. It is attended with circumstances singularly characteristic of cowardice and tyranny. My blood boils to madness to think of it. A poor boy, whom I found starving with his mother in a hiding-place of unutterable filth and misery, whom I rescued, and was about to teach to read,—has been snatched, on a charge of false and villainous effrontery

to a magistrate of Hell, who gave him the alternative of the *tender* or of military servitude. He preferred neither, yet was compelled to be a soldier. This has come to my knowledge this morning. I am resolved to prosecute this business to the very jaws of Government, snatching (if possible) the poison from its fangs. A widow-woman with three infants were taken up by two constables. I remonstrated, I pleaded: I was everything that my powers could make me. The landlady was overcome. The constable relented; and, when I asked him if he had a heart, he said—To be sure he had, as well as another man, but—that he was called out to business of this nature sometimes twenty times in a night. The woman's crime was stealing a penny loaf. She is, however, drunken, and nothing that I or anyone can do can save her from ultimate ruin and starvation. I am sick of this city and long to be with you and peace. The rich *grind* the poor into abjectness, and then complain that they are abject. They goad them to famine, and hang them if they steal a loaf."

!No less remarkable than Shelley's printed *Address* to the Irish was his oral address delivered on February 28 at the Fishamble Street Theatre, remarkable for the courage of one scarcely more than a boy, an English boy, in addressing a brilliant audience of the Irish aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> Shelley was but one of several speakers and, looking even younger than he was, the least remarked. Nevertheless he displayed power as an orator and his remarks were well received and favorably reported. The most interesting comment is one salvaged by Mr. MacCarthy from *The Dublin Journal*. In a letter dated March 7 by "An Englishman" unwitting tribute is paid to Shelley's power as a speaker: "I...heard...a most disgusting harangue from a stripling, with whom I am unacquainted, but who, I am sorry to say, styled himself my countryman—an Englishman. This young gentleman, after stating that he had been only a fortnight in Ireland, expatiated on the miseries which this country endured in consequence of its connexion with his own, and asserted...that its cities were depopulated, its fields laid waste, and its inhabitants degraded and enslaved; and all this by its union with England. If it revolted against my principles, Mr. Editor, to hear such language from one of my own countrymen, you will readily conceive that my disgust was infinitely heightened to observe with what transport the invectives of this renegade Englishman against his native country were *hailed* by the assembly he addressed. Joy beamed in every countenance and rapture glistened in every eye at the aggravated detail: the delirium of ecstasy got the better of prudential control..." Shelley must have spoken with

power to have stirred an audience, even though friendly, to the degree stated by this acidulous critic.

*The Weekly Messenger* of Dublin in its issue of March 7 contains a friendly article of several hundred words commendatory of the young Englishman, Mr. Shelly [*sic*], and quotes extensively from Shelley's second pamphlet published in Ireland, his "Proposals for an Association of Those Philanthropists, Who Convinced of the Inadequacy of the Moral and Political State of Ireland to Produce Benefits Which Are Nevertheless Attainable Are Willing to Unite to Accomplish Its Regeneration." (There would seem little that need be added to this by way of explanation. Nor when early in the piece the reader encounters the following passage is he encouraged to read further: "...this emancipation... will add not one comfort to the cottager... will root not out one vice, alleviate not one pang, yet it is the fore-ground of a picture, in the dimness of whose distance, I behold the lion lay down with the lamb, and the infant play with the basilisk— For it supposes the extermination of the eyeless monster bigotry, whose throne has tottered for two hundred years. I hear the teeth of the palsied beldame Superstition chatter, and I see her descending to the grave!" All that can be said in mitigation of this highfalutin passage is that Shelley was still a very young author subject to attacks of "style.")

In the elaboration of his scheme for an Association to develop public opinion in behalf of reform Shelley does not notably enlarge upon points made in the *Address*, but in a few particulars his ideas have a subsequent importance in relation to other works; therefore I shall run briefly over what seems to me to be significant. The Catholic Emancipation is in his eyes of little importance to the masses of Irish but its attainment would be an earnest of other and more vital reforms. The repeal of the Union Act would have a far more widespread influence, as its effects would be economic. It would be "a substantial benefit." The well-being of the Irish poor would then be on a level with that of the English poor. The association which he proposes is not only to advance these causes but, more, to propagate philanthropy generally. Its aims are to be confined to Ireland only for a time. It is a part of the larger philanthropic movement ultimately to embrace mankind. That government and the priesthood would disapprove of such an association is evident. It would be obnoxious to them and the members of the association would be persecuted. Nevertheless the association should not be secret but open in its activities. Men would be but exercising their constitutional rights in

it. Shelley argues the case: What is a constitution? What is the function of government? The argument is derived from Godwin and others. A government has no rights in itself. It exists only to preserve the rights of its citizens. Constitutionally the association but exercises its inalienable rights. Yet the government, notwithstanding, will harass its members. The association in exercising its constitutional right to assemble and discuss freely, though disobedient to an unjust government, will be obeying the dictates of a higher, a moral law. This must always be superior to man-made law. Shelley here repeats what Godwin elaborately argues in *Political Justice*.

Of more interest, because more evidently the product of his own thought, is his explanation of the failure of the French Revolution. The Revolution "was occasioned by the literary labors of the Encyclopedists." Yet it is "doubtful whether D'Alembert, Boulanger, and Condorcet . . . were the causes of the overthrow of the ancient monarchy of France. Thus much is certain, that they contributed greatly to the extension and diffusion of knowledge, and that knowledge is incompatible with slavery." It was the failure of enlightened doctrines to reach a sufficient number and profoundly to affect them which led to the murders of the Revolution: "The doctrines of Philanthropy and Freedom, were but shallowly understood." The leaders of thought were not wholly pure. "Voltaire was the flatterer of Kings, though in his heart he despised them:—so far has he been instrumental in the present slavery of his country. Rousseau gave licence by his writings, to passions that only incapacitate and contract the human heart. . . ."—a sentence which may explain the rôle which Rousseau plays in Shelley's last poem, the unfinished *Triumph of Life*. In the French Revolution there were many who "risked their lives and happiness" to benefit mankind. But they were not enough. It is the object of the association which Shelley proposes "to assist in the production of such men."

¶For the improvement of mankind, for successful revolution, it is necessary, then, that a sufficient number of men be educated in the principles of pure philanthropy. The idea is not wholly his, but that he should seize upon it in youth is revealing. It becomes, I think, the guiding principle of his life. In all his subsequent activities whether as a reformer with an immediate and practical end, or whether as philosopher writing in prose and verse, his aim always is to disseminate ideas. //

There is but one further point in the "Proposals" that I think of much significance, his allusion to Malthus. Fearing lest the proposed



betterment of the human lot should seem futile to philanthropists by reason of the Malthusian doctrine he wrestles somewhat ineffectually with the problem: "Many well-meaning persons may think that the attainment of the good, which I propose... is visionary and inconsistent with human nature: they would tell me not to make people happy, for fear of overstocking the world, and to permit those who found dishes placed before them on the table of partial nature, to enjoy their superfluities in quietness, though millions of wretches crowded around but to pick a morsel, which morsel was still refused to the prayers of agonizing famine." He declares that "war, vice, and misery are undeniably bad, they embrace all that we can conceive of temporal and eternal evil. Are we to be told that these are remedyless, because the earth would, in case of their remedy, be overstocked?" The Philanthropist should deal with the "evils that admit of amendment" regardless of "other evils, which, in the course of sixty centuries may again derange the system of happiness." This, if not wholly a satisfactory answer to Malthus, is a recognition of the power which the Malthusian doctrine had shown in chilling the altruistic spirit of the day. The Malthusian doctrine, superficially examined, seemed to justify the rich and the powerful in their practice of inaction before the evident ills of society. Improve the lot of the poor and there would be more poor to care for. Malthus on population was, as Hazlitt observed, highly popular with the upper classes and a copy of his book was to be found on the table of every country house. Malthus served conveniently to deaden the consciences of the selfish by demonstrating the futility of reform. Malthus was, of course, unjustly exploited to this end. Unfortunately Godwin's reply to Malthus was feeble and the far more penetrating refutation by Hazlitt was apparently little known and of no practical effect. Shelley, clearly, is troubled by the ghost of Malthus.

The "Proposals for an Association" met with little success. "My *youth*," Shelley wrote Miss Hitchener, (February 27), "is much against me here. Strange that truth should not be judged by its inherent excellence, independent of any reference to the utterer!" And in the same letter he writes, "I of course am hated by both these parties"—the oppositionist and the ministerial. Godwin threw cold water upon the enterprise from the outset and Shelley, not wholly convinced by prudential counsels, yet accepts them with humility: "... when you reprove me, reason speaks; I acquiesce in her decisions. I know that I am vain, that I assume a character which is perhaps unadapted to the limitedness of my experience, that I am without the

modesty which is so generally considered an indispensable ornament to the ingenuousness of youth. . . . That I have erred in pursuance of this line of conduct I am well aware: in the opposite case, I think my errors would have been more momentous and overwhelming. . . . I certainly believe that the line of conduct which I am now pursuing will produce a preponderance of good; when I get rid of this conviction, my conduct shall be changed." (March 8.) He pays his customary tribute to the influence of Godwin's writings upon him: "To them, to you, I owe the inestimable boon of granted power, of arising from the state of intellectual sickliness and lethargy into which I was plunged two years ago, and of which 'St. Irvyne' and 'Zastrozzi' were the distempered, although unoriginal visions." He adds shrewdly anent Godwin's disapproval of the proposed associations: "I am not forgetful or unheeding of what you said of associations. But 'Political Justice' was first published in 1793; nearly twenty years have elapsed since the general diffusion of its doctrines. What has followed? Have men ceased to fight? Have vice and misery vanished from the earth?" Of those who read it for its novelty he asks, how many have "yielded with fashion to the arguments of Mr. Malthus?" Godwin had largely failed. Might not the associations Shelley proposed be more successful? Though he yields to Godwin he is unconvinced.

In his letter to Godwin of March 18, Shelley returns to the defense of his conduct: "I have said that I acquiesce in your decision, nor has my conduct militated with the assertion. I have withdrawn from circulation the publications wherein I erred, and am preparing to quit Dublin. It is not because I think that *such* associations as I conceived, would be deleterious, that I have withdrawn them. It is possible to festinate, or retard, the progress of human perfectibility; such associations as I would have recommended would be calculated to produce the former effect; the refinement of secessions would prevent a fictitious unanimity, as their publicity would render ineffectual any schemes of violent innovation. I am not one of those whom pride will restrain from admitting my own short-sightedness, or confessing a conviction which wars with those previously avowed. My schemes of organizing the ignorant I confess to be ill-timed. I cannot conceive that they were dangerous, as unqualified publicity was likewise enforced; moreover I do not see that a peasant would attentively read my address, and, arising from the perusal, become imbued in sentiments of violence and bloodshed." It is painful, he observes, to look upon human beings "capable of soaring to the heights of science, with Newton and Locke, without attempting to awaken them from

a state of lethargy so opposite. The part of this city called the Liberty, exhibits a spectacle of squalidness and misery, such as might reasonably excite impatience in a cooler temperament than mine. But I submit; I shall address myself no more to the illiterate. I will look to events in which it will be impossible that I can share, and make myself the cause of an effect which will take place ages after I have mouldered in the dust; I need not observe that this resolve requires stoicism. To return to the heartless bustle of ordinary life, to take interest in its uninteresting details; I cannot. Wholly to abstract our views from self, undoubtedly requires unparalleled disinterestedness. There is not a completer abstraction than labouring for distant ages."

The disillusionments of sanguine youth are doubly sad when youth is both idealistic and courageous, prepared to pursue its illusions even to martyrdom. Perhaps had Godwin not thrown cold water on his disciple's ardor Shelley would have become a demagogue in the cause of the Reform Bill, to perish may be in some Peterloo massacre or to survive and become a member of the Reform Parliament. It would, I think, have been a happier life for him, however less useful in the long run than the course he pursued. No doubt there were other causes than Godwin's disapproval which led him to renounce the career of demagogue. ¶The appalling extent of the misery of the poor and of the injustice practiced by the rich came home to him in Dublin. ¶He had known these facts intellectually before but never, in so intimate a sense, as an eye-witness. Such misery implied a greater obduracy in the human heart than was to be softened by appeals to reason. Nor among those sensible of these wrongs was there any unanimity of sentiment, any common purpose. He learned in Dublin "that more hate me as a free-thinker than love me as a votary of freedom. . . . The spirit of Bigotry is high." He was to devote his life to fighting bigotry but with the tool of the literary man, the pen, not that of the stump speaker, the tongue. He addresses, henceforth, the literate. ¶His effort is to preach love, and tolerance, and reasonableness to the rulers of society; and with no visible effects in his lifetime. So to do required of him, as he says, "unparalleled disinterestedness." ¶The sense of frustration so evident in Shelley's poetry has its root, I believe, in this renunciation of a more active life. ¶The brief Irish episode too lightly dismissed by biographers was of the profoundest significance in his mental history. ¶

The lightness with which this experience is universally regarded is largely due to Hogg, though the contrary evidence of Shelley's letters is, as has been seen, sufficiently explicit. No better proof of

Hogg's complete unfitness as a biographer could be asked than his comment on Shelley's experiences in Ireland: "I had never heard him mention Catholic Emancipation, or Catholic Disabilities; and I do not believe that he ever had any definite notion of the meaning of these party phrases. As to the Union Act, I am very sure that he was always entirely ignorant of that statute, of its enactments and provisions, having certainly never read a single clause, or line, of the Act, which he suddenly took upon himself to abrogate. I have often wondered, and endeavoured to discover, but without success, who put this notable project into his head. I have suspected that he fell in with some wandering apostle of Irish grievances hiding himself amongst the mountains, because he disliked the companionship of Oreads and Dryads less than that of sheriff's officers and catchpoles—with some Hibernian Hampden brimful of sympathy for his persecuted country, and of aversion for his persecuting creditors. . . . But I never could discover the source of the strange scheme. He did not communicate his intentions to me at the time. I never heard of his exploits in Dublin until after their termination, and but little did I learn at any period from himself. He seldom spoke of them. If he ever referred to the subject at all it was briefly; and in truth he appeared to be heartily ashamed of the whole proceeding. Whatever can be discovered concerning this Irish dream, the vision of want of judgment, must be made out from his correspondence with his newly acquired friend. . . . Bysshe invariably sent me a copy of all his other works, whether long or short, in verse or in prose, as soon as they were published, or more commonly as soon as they were printed, but he never gave me, either at the time of their appearance or subsequently, his two Irish pamphlets. . . . I never saw any other copies than those which are now in my possession. I would willingly, therefore, give some extracts, but I cannot find a single paragraph worthy to be transcribed. They are poorly and feebly written; the style and the matter are worthy of the printer and the occasion, but quite unworthy of the author."

## CHAPTER V

### *Student of Philosophy*



THE government regarded Shelley's activities in Ireland somewhat more seriously than did Hogg. A box containing copies of the *Address* and of a broadside printed in Ireland but not there circulated, a *Declaration of Rights*, was seized at Holyhead by the authorities. In the box, which was addressed to Elizabeth Hitchener, was a letter from Harriet containing the words, "As Percy has sent you such a large Box so full of inflammable matter." This expression and the pamphlets and broadsides became the cause of a considerable correspondence among high officials. A watch was promised to be put upon Miss Hitchener to "discover whether there is any connexion between her and Shelley." The official letters which Mac-Carthy uncovered are not without interest as governmental mare's-nests and indicate that Shelley might easily in that reactionary time have suffered trial and imprisonment for treasonable activities. The *Declaration of Rights* soon did involve Shelley's servant in trouble, bringing upon him, for its distribution, a sentence of imprisonment. Meanwhile the Shelleys settled for a brief time near Rhayader in Wales.

"Settled" is scarcely the word, for the two and a half months of this first Welsh visit were distracted by an unsuccessful effort to secure a house and sufficient funds to pay for it. The letters to Miss Hitchener and to Godwin describe the residence and farm he desired to acquire, the home in which he wished Miss Hitchener to make her permanent residence and which Godwin was urged to visit. It was to be a center of enlightenment: "The 'Declaration of Rights' would be useful in farm-houses: it was by a similar expedient that Franklin promulgated his commercial opinions among the Americans." The letter containing this statement (? April 16) gives the reason for his departure from Dublin: "We left Dublin because I had done all that I could do; if its effects were beneficial, they were not greatly so." He continues with his customary vivacity: "That infernal wretch the P[rince] of Wales demands more money, the Princesses must have more; Mr. McMahon [Keeper of the Privy Purse] must have more. And for what? For supplying the Augean stable of the Prince with filth which no second Hercules can cleanse."

The Prince Regent with his immoralities and extravagances was little likely in a time of economic depression and widespread misery to excite admiration in the breast of the author of the *Declaration of Rights*, which document may properly be considered at this place.

The *Declaration of Rights* in thirty-one numbered paragraphs and a brief additional paragraph by way of peroration is derivative, as are most of Shelley's political ideas at this period, from the school of revolutionary political thought that flourished to the time of the Terror. Its points can be briefly stated. Government, which exercises a delegated authority, has no rights in itself but exists merely to protect the rights of its citizens. The majority in every country have the right to perfect their government (all governments being defective) as they see fit: "...the minority should not disturb them, they ought to secede, and form their own system in their own way." All should share equally in the benefits and burdens of government and any coercion exercised should be as light as possible. Resistance to the law should be exercised only by the reason and to secure its repeal. Every man has the right to think "as his reason directs" and to express his thought freely. It is his duty to do so and to speak the truth on every occasion [Godwin's cardinal tenet]. Government cannot make law but only define what already exists in the nature of things. Nor can the present generation bind their posterity. Politics should be conducted on principles of morality. It is not "right to do an evil thing that good may come." A uniform does not excuse murder. A government should be wholly indifferent to every opinion. People believe as they must. Men of all religious beliefs have equal rights. A man should be respected only for virtue and talents. Titles, power, glory, and wealth are entitled to no regard. No man has the right to monopolize more than he can enjoy. Every man has a right to a certain degree of leisure and liberty in which to improve his mind. "Sobriety of body and mind is necessary to those who would be free.... The only use of government is to repress the vices of man." If men were sinless they could do without government and its evils. The peroration declares: "Man! thou whose rights are here declared, be no longer forgetful of the loftiness of thy destination." By seizing these rights man may "arrive at happiness and freedom." The peroration concludes: "*Awake!—arise!—or be for ever fallen.*"

Echoes of the age of Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine! Much of the political reality had already passed from these words. The Constitution of the United States had deflated the *Declaration of Independence*, and the French Revolution and the tyranny

of Napoleon had marked the end of the democratic dream in France. If to the modern ear these phrases have an archaic ring it is not to our credit, perhaps, that it is so. Yet they must still carry some threat to power, for not long ago in the United States a man was arrested for reading aloud on a street corner the *Declaration of Independence*. Shelley was but repeating democratic truisms once regarded as axiomatic by all men of liberal opinion. Those in Shelley's day who openly avowed them courted danger. To preach the commonplaces of the democratic dogma was, in effect, to those in authority, to declare a sympathy with the French Revolution. Dread of the "red, fool fury of the Seine" lingered well down into Victorian times. That Shelley deprecated violence and asked only freedom of speech did not make his offense the less. Government knew only too well what unrestricted freedom of speech would do to government. It was taking no chances. For posting this Declaration later, in Devon, Shelley's servant was fined and imprisoned.

The *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, also of this period, has to do with freedom of publication and may properly be considered as a postscript to the *Declaration*. The letter, dated June 1812, and printed in Barnstaple where the impression was in greater part destroyed by the printer, was occasioned by Lord Ellenborough's sentencing D. I. Eaton, the publisher of the third part of Paine's *Age of Reason*, to eighteen months' imprisonment and to the pillory. The letter is a bitter and in part an overrhetorical demand that his Lordship show by what right he passed such a sentence. "It is true, my Lord, laws exist which suffice to screen you from the animadversion of any constituted power, in consequence of the unmerited sentence which you have passed upon Mr. Eaton; but there are no laws which screen you from the reproof of a nation's disgust, none which ward off the just judgment of posterity, if that posterity will deign to recollect you. . . .

"What but antiquated precedents, gathered from times of priestly and tyrannical domination, can be adduced in palliation of an outrage so insulting to humanity and justice?" The prosecution, availing itself of popular prejudice, had inflamed a jury of Christians against Eaton because he was a Deist. Why had not the judge prevented such unconstitutional pleading? Eaton was in fact tried and punished, as was Socrates, merely because "He has questioned established opinions?" Religion never forgives the crime of enquiry. "Implicit faith and fearless enquiry have in all ages been irreconcilable enemies." With the growth of science miracles have become rare. "That

which is false will ultimately be controverted by its own falsehood. That which is true needs but publicity to be acknowledged." The employment of force is a confession of falsehood. Eaton, a Deist, was punished by a Christian judge who but imitated those who once persecuted Christians. Can such punishment convert Eaton? "Belief and disbelief are utterly distinct from and unconnected with volition." Persecution such as Descartes and Voltaire knew is being revived in a new age under a government which boasts freedom of speech and liberty of the press. Does Christ authorize such persecution? Were the Apostles "enjoined to stab and poison all who disbelieved in the divinity of Christ's mission...?"

The opinions of the accused appear "more true and good than those of his accuser;—but were they false as the visions of a Calvinist" it would be the duty of all lovers of liberty to permit their expression. Eaton denied miracles and the divinity of Christ. The prosecutor, holding opposite opinions, invoked "obsolete and tyrannical laws" against the defendant but the truth or falsehood of the controverted facts remains unproved. The defendant's opinions are said to be subversive of morality. Morality is the duty of a man and a citizen and is "in similar situations...precisely the same in all ages and nations." No revelation of any unknown power can justify the persecution of one who expresses a disbelief in any established system but whose actions do not violate social bonds. Moral qualities pertain to man, not God, whose nature is unknown, though to him are attributed the qualities of goodness and justice which men in persecuting their fellows for disbelief in effect deny. Persecution is ineffectual and unconvincing. The executions of Socrates and Christ did not lead to the death of their beliefs but to their wider acceptance. Socrates became a demigod and Christ was believed divine. Christianity, now dominant, resorts to the same means to suppress disbelief as were once employed to suppress Christianity. Is it not likely that Christianity, therefore, like other beliefs before it, will sometime perish? Did it persist merely by the forces of persuasion and reason it need not so surely fear destruction. Had not the Jews "been a barbarous and fanatical race of men, had even the resolution of Pontius Pilate been equal to his candour, the Christian Religion never could have prevailed, it could not even have existed."

Men, considering the ancestry of their beliefs, should learn humility and acknowledge at least that the falsehood of others' opinions is insufficient reason for hatred of them. "If persecution for religious opinions were admitted by the moralist, how wide a door would not



be open by which convulsionists of every kind might make inroads on the peace of society! How many deeds of barbarism and blood would not receive a sanction!" Is not a man who questions accepted beliefs one entitled to respect? Either he proves their falsehood or establishes their existence. In either case he is a benefactor. "I do not warn you to beware lest your profession as a Christian should make you forget that you are a man;—but I warn you against festinating that period, which, under the present coercive system, is too rapidly maturing, when the seats of justice shall be the seats of venality and slavishness, and the cells of Newgate become the abode of all that is honorable and true." The Newgates of the world attest only too truly the prophetic character of Shelley's words. Nor is his stronger utterance extreme: "... I will assert that, should a second Jesus arise among men; should such a one as Socrates again enlighten the earth; lengthened imprisonment and infamous punishment (according to the regimen of persecution revived by your Lordship) would effect, what hemlock and the cross have heretofore effected, and the stain on the national character, like that on Athens and Judea, would remain indelible, but by the destruction of the history in which it is recorded." The words recall Byron's remark to Trelawny: "And Shelley, too, the best and most benevolent of men; they hooted him out of his country like a mad dog, for questioning a dogma. Man is the same rancorous beast now that he was from the beginning, and if the Christ they profess to worship re-appeared, they would again crucify him."

Shelley does not conclude his letter on so hopeless a note: "The time is rapidly approaching, I hope that you, my Lord, may live to behold its arrival, when the Mahometan, the Jew, the Christian, the Deist, and the Atheist will live together in one community, equally sharing the benefits which arise from its association, and united in the bonds of charity and brotherly love." He does not, he says, address the letter in the hope of convincing Lord Ellenborough that he has done wrong, but, "to assert, so far as I am capable of influencing, those rights of humanity which you have wantonly and unlawfully infringed." The hope expressed of a better day to dawn is characteristic, recurring in *Queen Mab*, *Prometheus*, and *Hellas*. The degree of conviction attained in each it will be our business to ascertain. Yet it is a fact curiously little stressed in Shelleyan criticism that from an early age he was a realist and saw human society without illusions, Peacock prophesied that had Shelley lived a little longer he would have been completely disillusioned. Surely the disillusionment was

evident in youth. Shelley's Utopian visions or dreams spring out of a too intolerable vision of the world as it is. The pace of his intellectual and emotional life was accelerated far beyond that of common men. At the age of twenty he had not only more intellectual grasp but fewer illusions than most intelligent men of twice his age. His Utopianism is the natural outgrowth of an ardent and altruistic mind confronted with the stark actuality of life. He lived so much in the future because the present was intolerable to him. That is not to say that he took refuge in dreams and contrived a complete mechanism of escape. The escape was transitory at best. He kept his grip upon actuality and increasingly, I believe, found strength to face it, despite the horror which it held for one of so sensitive and benevolent a nature.

The letters written in Wales prior to the removal to Devon are mostly to Godwin and Elizabeth Hitchener. The latter's visit to and residence with Harriet and Shelley was opposed both by her father and by Shelley's uncle and aunt, the Pilfolds, to whose children Miss Hitchener was governess. Gossip, instigated as Shelley surmised by Mrs. Pilfold, described her as Shelley's prospective mistress. Shelley found the rôle of Lovelace not to his liking and his remarks upon human nature and upon Mr. Hitchener and the Pilfolds fairly scorch the paper upon which they were written: "And what new thing have they advanced to shake this cherished plan? That you are to be *my Mistress!* that you refused it whilst I was single, but that my marriage takes away all objections that before stood in the way of this singular passion! . . . are we or are we not to sacrifice an attachment in which far more than you and I are immediately implicated . . . ? . . . And to sacrifice to what? To the *world!* to the swinish multitude, to the indiscriminating million, to such as burnt the House of Priestley, such as murdered Fitzgerald, such as erect Barracks in Marylebone, such as began and such as continue this liberticide war . . . [and] the slaves who permit such things." Unfortunately we do not know Miss Hitchener's response to such devotion save that ultimately she consented to urgency, apparently fell in love with her host to the consternation of both Shelley and Harriet, became instead of his "beloved friend" the "brown demon," and was firmly dismissed with a pension. His letters should have warned her of the nature of the man, have told her that his love was wholly Platonic. He writes, "I have much to talk to you of. Innate Passions, God, Christianity, etc. when we meet. Would not 'co-existent with our organization' be a more correct phrase for passions than 'innate'? I think I can prove

to you that *our* God is the same." What he sought in her was an intelligent but impersonal listener, one with whom to hold Socratic dialogues.

† A letter (May 7) to Catherine Nugent, a Dublin friend, reveals his ever-present concern with the immediate political scene. Hogg endeavors to create the impression that Shelley did not even read the newspapers and was wholly ignorant of political issues. Nothing could be more deliberately false. In Hogg's lies and in the common refusal of literary critics subsequently to take Shelley's social tirades seriously is manifest the human refusal to look unpleasant facts in the face. Stress is therefore put upon Shelley's impracticality, upon the dream world of his poetic imagining. That world is not, consequently, understood, for it is intelligible only as Shelley is understood, and his passionate hatred of economic injustice and social pretense is the very essence of his nature. He was in as deadly earnest as was Christ in his desire to replace the hatred and injustice of human life by love and kindness. He was either anarchist or communist according to definition. Hogg and others who do not wish to admit the reality of life as Shelley envisaged it have therefore to falsify Shelley beyond recognition. He writes thus to Catherine Nugent: "How unequally has the detestable system by which human beings govern their affairs distributed poverty and wealth. How much do you suffer from the distribution. Had you the millions which the Prince will possess how would England not be benefited! were *he* compelled to sit in Mr. Newman's shop and sew fur on to satin, in what would she be injured? !..

"I fear that hunger is the only excitement of our English riotings; any change which they may produce appears to me likely to be devoid of principle and method. I sincerely hope that a just indignation against that crowned coward and villain the Prince does prevail, but I do not think that it has gained any strength. The local Militia, that body of soldiery nearest approaching and immediately mingling with the character of citizen, have been called out near Carlisle and other great towns to quell the populace. That the Government has dared to call the local [forces] into action appears to be an evidence that at least they do not think that disaffection to Government (except so far as directly connected with starvation) has any share in these tumults."

† He writes to Godwin a little earlier (April 25), "We are no longer in Dublin. Never did I behold in any other spot a contrast so striking as that which grandeur and misery form in that unfortunate

country. How forcibly do I feel the remark which you put into the mouth of Fleetwood, that the distress which in the country humanizes the heart by its infrequency, is calculated in a city, by the multiplicity of its demands for relief, to render us callous to the contemplation of wretchedness. Surely the inequality of rank is not felt so oppressively in England.” In a letter of June 3 is matter more personal, important in the light that it casts upon his mind and reading. Until marriage his life was, he says, a “series of illness... of a nervous and spasmodic nature.” Thus partly incapacitated for study he read romances unremittingly “and pored over the reveries of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. . . . My fondness for natural magic and ghosts abated, as my age increased. I read Locke, Hume, Reid, and whatever metaphysics came in my way, without, however, renouncing poetry, an attachment to which has characterized all my wanderings and changes. I did not truly *think* and *feel*, however, until I read ‘Political Justice,’ though my thoughts and feelings, after this period, have been more painful, anxious and vivid—more inclined to action and less to theory. Before I was a republican: Athens appeared to me the model of governments; but afterwards, Athens bore in my mind the same relation to perfection that Great Britain did to Athens.” He confesses that he is still “wanting in that mild and equable benevolence concerning which you question me.” Nevertheless he hopes that he improves and that in Godwin’s words “desire never fails to generate capacity.” His knowledge of the “chivalric age,” he says, is small but this defect he will remedy. “During my existence, I have incessantly speculated, thought, and read.” He concludes with a reference of moment: “I have just finished reading ‘La Système de la Nature,’ par M. Mirabaud. Do you know the real author? It appears to me a work of uncommon powers.” The book is Holbach’s notable defense of materialism and determinism. Its influence on *Queen Mab*, published the year after (1813), is marked. That Shelley had, as it seems, not read it before helps to date at least part of *Queen Mab*. In a letter of June 11 he makes one additional confession of great interest, that it was an admiration of the virtues and genius of Greece and Rome that led him to doubt Christianity “as a revelation from divinity.” He asks, “Shall Socrates and Cicero perish, whilst the meanest hind of modern England inherits eternal life?”

Failure to secure the farm he desired in Wales led Shelley to remove to Lynmouth in Devon where he remained but a few weeks, danger of governmental action driving him back to Wales after the

arrest of his Irish servant for posting the *Declaration of Rights*. That Shelley was suspect and more or less under surveillance is proof sufficient of the autocracy of the time and the danger of preaching liberal doctrines. Had he not been an heir to wealth and the son of a member of parliament it is not improbable he would have suffered more than he did from official persecution, innocent as his actions were. That he remained wholly alienated from his family is explicable as much on these grounds as upon his religious heresies. More indeed. Shelley was a traitor to his class, repudiating the distinctions of caste and wealth, a greater crime than professed atheism. Indeed the epithet "atheist" in which Shelley gloried was merely a convenient way of saying that he was a rebel against superstition, convention, and authority. He was never in a theological sense an atheist; rather a sceptic or an agnostic. Trelawny records that, asking him why he called himself "atheist," Shelley replied, "It is a word of abuse to stop discussion, a painted devil to frighten the foolish, a threat to intimidate the wise and good. I used it to express my abhorrence of superstition; I took up the word, as a knight took up a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice. The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality: they limit thought."

It was Shelley's custom to accumulate books wherever he went and his removal to each new residence was accompanied by requests to his correspondents to furnish him with volumes which claimed his interest at the time. The letters written other than in Edinburgh and London are thus peculiarly useful in the hints which they convey of Shelley's intellectual interests. From Lynmouth he writes (July 29, 1812) asking for "Milton's Prose Works, 'Elements of Chemical Philosophy,' by Sir H. Davy, . . . 'Medical Extracts,' Hartley 'On Man,' 'Rights of Women,' by Mary Wollstonecraft." Davy and Mrs. Wollstonecraft are especially important in the history of his thought as will be later apparent. So, too, was Holbach whose *La Systême de la Nature* Shelley discusses in a letter to Godwin of July 29. "Although, like you, an irreconcilable enemy to the system of self-love, both from a feeling of its deformity and a conviction of its falsehood, I can by no means conceive how the loftiest disinterestedness is incompatible with the strictest materialism. In fact the doctrine which affirms that there is no such thing as matter, and that which affirms that all is matter, appear to me perfectly indifferent in the question between benevolence and self-love. I cannot see how they interfere with each other, or why the two doctrines of materialism and disinterestedness cannot be held in one mind as independently

of each other, as the two truths that a cricket-ball is round and a box square. Immateriality seems to me nothing but a simple denial of the presence of matter, of the presence of all the forms of being with which our senses are acquainted, and it surely is somewhat inconsistent to assign real existence to what is a mere negation of all that actual world to which our senses introduce us." Shelley in this passage touches upon two points which are cardinal in his later philosophy. Upon both he was later to express ideas very different from those here defined. He had not yet perceived the incompatibility of materialism with a belief in moral freedom, or the justification of immateriality both in the current theories of science and in the Platonic philosophy. Yet he seems intuitively to have perceived their significance even though his interpretation of them is still in the naïve terms of Locke and Holbach.

Berkeley seems upon a first reading rather to have strengthened his belief in materialism than to have shaken it. He resumes to Godwin: "I have read Berkeley, and the perusal of his arguments tended more than anything to convince me that immaterialism, and other words of general usage, deriving all their force from mere predicates in *non*, were invented by the pride of philosophers to conceal their ignorance, even from themselves." Though in a sense he later holds to this belief, contending that the distinction between subjective and objective and material and immaterial is a matter only of terminology and of no true importance, he does in reality come by way of Platonism and science much closer to Berkeley than in this first repudiation. In his later synthesis of matter with spirit, or of spirit with matter, he does in effect, through the reduction of matter to a manifestation of energy, remove all distinction between the terms. This conclusion is harmonious with Berkeley, essentially, for if all energy is animate as Shelley came to believe, and the universe is no more than energy in its various forms, it is but a step to declare that nothing exists but thought. Shelley's early endorsement and seeming later approval of Lloyd's comment that "mind does not create" will need in its due place to be weighed. If mind does not create, what, then, does? Perhaps the difficulty will be found to lie in the implications to Shelley of the word "mind." At the age of twenty he is an avowed materialist unaware of the metaphysical difficulties of his position and forgetful of those earlier affirmations which have been cited from his youthful letters.

The letter to Godwin, while revealing deference to a teacher and, presumably, an intellectual superior, displays nevertheless a polite con-

roversial spirit. Shelley is by no means ready to accept Godwin's beliefs unchallenged. "Reason," he remarks, "if I may be permitted to personify it, is as much your superior, as you are mine." Though agreeing on most points he notably differs on others, chief amongst them, oddly, on the benefits to be derived from classical learning. Shelley who was already somewhat of a classical scholar and later to become an excellent one, is of the opinion "that the evils of acquiring Greek and Latin considerably overbalance the benefit." He explains his "reasons for doubting the efficacy of classical learning as a means of forwarding the interests of the human race." With dialectical deftness he observes, "I do not perceive how one of the truths of 'Political Justice' rests on the excellence of ancient literature." Are not the reasonings of Godwin's system "utterly . . . unconnected with the excellence of Greece and Rome?" The governments of those states were "as oppressive and arbitrary" as that of Great Britain. The poets, with the exception of Lucretius, set honour above virtue. The politics of Greece and Rome were narrow and corrupt, preferring "self-interest to virtue, and expediency to positive good." Admitting the value of Latin as a grammar and a key to the European languages, he thinks that "natural philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and, above all, history, would be sufficient employments for immaturity; employments which would completely fill up the era of tutelage and render unnecessary all expedients for losing time well by gaining it safely." The vindicators of the ancient learning, he remarks, are "vindicators of a literary despotism." They draw a "circle which is intended to shut out from real knowledge, and to which this fictitious knowledge is attached, all who do not breathe the air of prejudice, or who will not support the established systems of politics, religion, and morals." Whereupon he concludes with a neat quotation from Horace.

At Lynmouth Miss Hitchener finally joined Shelley and Harriet. Harriet's naïve comment to Miss Nugent sufficiently characterizes Miss Hitchener: "She is very busy writing for the good of mankind. She is very dark in complexion, with a great quantity of long black hair. She talks a great deal. If you like great talkers she will suit you." Harriet attempts somewhat to temper these remarks but the impression thus conveyed remains and, one feels, justly. Harriet was not a bad hand at catching character suggestions. Continuing anent Miss Hitchener and Godwin: "She laughs and talks and writes all day. She has seen the Godwins, and thinks Godwin different to what he seems, he lives so much from his family, only seeing them at stated

hours. We do not like that, and he thinks himself such a very great *man*. He would not let one of his children come to *us* first because he had not seen our faces." The expression "we do not like that" implies that Shelley shared the sentiment, as quite possibly he did. Shelley's judgments of men he admired, for all his seeming enthusiasm, were often qualified by a shrewd note of discernment. He admired Godwin, Peacock, and Byron but in unguarded moments he characterized them unflatteringly though justly. Seemingly he judged people upon a two-fold basis, their services to literature and their personalities divorced of their genius. He endeavored, not always successfully, to forget personal defects in admiration for their gifts.

In a letter of August 12 to some unidentified correspondent Shelley sets forth his ideas of the relation of the individual to the state. The correspondent had evidently declared some sort of fascist philosophy, for Shelley in reply declares, "A human being is a member of the community, not as a limb is a member of the body, or as what is a part of a machine, intended only to contribute to some general, joint result. He was created not to be merged in the whole as a drop in the ocean, or as a particle of sand on the sea-shore.... He is an ultimate being, made for his own perfection as his highest end, made to maintain an individual existence, and to serve others only as far as consists with his own virtue and progress." Autocrats, he remarks, have always endeavored to subordinate the individual to outward authority, "have called the private man the property of the State, meaning generally by the State themselves." With this theory Shelley sharply disagrees. "Nothing seems to me so needful as to give to the mind the consciousness... of its own separate work." The progress of society he contends means nothing more than this heightened individuality of its members. "Individuality, or moral self-subsistence, is the secret foundation of an all-comprehending love." It is from this, not from servile obedience, that the state derives its best service. "Property, life, he should joyfully surrender to the State. But his soul he must never stain or enslave." Shelley seems to have been aware of the problem which his own extreme individualism presented in any scheme of human advancement. The ultimate goal is complete anarchism in which the individual acts for the common good out of his own inner compulsion. As steps thereto he seemingly approved of an orderly democratization of political institutions, and economically of a voluntary communism of goods. The mechanics of the economic democratization of society did not seemingly concern him, as indeed it did not Godwin nor the French encyclope-



dists. It was a problem with which the generations subsequent to Shelley's were to concern themselves, though the laissez-faire doctrine, falsely deriving from Adam Smith, was the avowed philosophy of the entrepreneurs created by the Industrial Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

A letter of the same period, August 17, introduces another theme important in Shelley's social philosophy, marriage in its relation to women. He was, as he says in this letter to Sir James Lawrence, author of *The Empire of the Nairs*, already a convert to the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and "retained no doubts of the evils of marriage... but I had been dull enough not to perceive the greatest argument against it, until developed in the 'Nairs,' viz., prostitution both legal and illegal." Lawrence's book, written first in German, then in French, and finally in English must have enjoyed considerable vogue, though English copies of it are now rare. It is a romance of no great merit set mostly in India, its interest deriving largely from its Introduction, which purports to set forth the sex customs which prevail among the Nairs of Malabar. These resemble the customs of the South Sea islands, inheritance being wholly through the mother and no marriage ties binding the woman in her choice of a father for her child, a state virtually of polyandry. Social happiness and a high degree of civilization, Lawrence holds, spring from this custom. He points out the evils deriving from European marriage customs, evils which Mrs. Wollstonecraft had discussed in their legal and economic aspects, woman being held virtually as property, and, in England seldom able to secure a divorce however galling the yoke. Lawrence's discussion stresses rather the happiness of a people, and their freedom from vice, whose women are free to choose lovers as they will. Women then are no longer enslaved by men. A social system of easy divorce such as already prevails in some European countries would be analogous to the system which Lawrence praises. Shelley was captivated by it because it made women men's equals, was strongly individualistic, and because it glorified human love. To one so little sensual as he the freedom in sex relations among the Nairs was not an invitation to license but a portent of that individualism of which he dreamed in the Utopian state. [Both *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus* attest the impression which Lawrence's book made upon him. The vices of "prostitution both legal and illegal" in his own words would, he believed, be extinguished by some system of virtuous promiscuity such as Lawrence portrayed.]

[A letter of August 18 to Thomas Hookham contains the first

reference to Thomas Love Peacock, destined to become one of Shelley's friends and executors, Hookham had sent Shelley two volumes of Peacock's verse, *The Genius of the Thames* and *The Philosophy of Melancholy*. Shelley while applauding the conclusion to "Palmyra" disapproves of Peacock's economics. "Mr. Peacock conceives that commerce is prosperity; and the glory of the British flag is the happiness of the British people; that George III, so far from having been a warrior and a tyrant, has been a patriot. To me it appears otherwise." Poetical eloquence will not seduce him to admiration of that which he disapproves. Peacock, says Shelley, regards commerce as conducive to the progress of liberty, truth, and virtue. Peacock, who later as an official of the East India Company introduced steam navigation to India, apparently remained of the same opinion still in after life despite his close association with Shelley in the years 1814-1818, though the influence of Shelley is apparent in several of his house-party novels, most notably in *Melincourt*. Of the personal relation of the two more will appear in the Marlow period and in Shelley's letters to Peacock from Italy.

Godwin, oft-invited, descended on Lynmouth only to find that the Shelleys had left abruptly for Wales. Threat of official interference as manifest in the prosecution of Shelley's servant for posting the *Declaration of Rights* was apparently the cause of this move. The Shelleys found a house near Tremadoc. Danger to the embankment which protected this town from the sea led Shelley to seek funds for its restoration. In November he is to be found in London endeavoring without success to obtain a subscription from the Duke of Norfolk, the political overlord of the Shelleys. He was himself hard put to it for funds. "I see no hope of effecting, on my part, any grand or decisive scheme until the expiration of my minority. In Sussex I meet with no encouragement. They are a parcel of cold, selfish, and calculating animals, who seem to have no other aim or business, on earth, but to eat, drink, and sleep; but in the meanwhile my fervid hopes, my ardent desires, my unremitting personal exertions (so far as my health will allow), are all engaged in that cause, which I will desert *but with my life*." Whether he means by the cause the restoration of the embankment at Tremadoc or the larger cause, the improvement of humanity, is not certain. At or about this time also Elizabeth Hitchener disappears from the scene. Harriet writes to Catherine Nugent (November 14): "We were entirely deceived in her character, . . . She built all her hopes on being able to separate me from my dearly loved Percy, and had the artfulness to say that

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Percy was really in love with her....And now, thank God, she has left us never more to return." It cost them, however, £100 a year to rid themselves of the "Brown Demon." Shelley's enthusiasms were not infrequently expensive. In another letter Harriet writes of the Godwins whom they had visited: "There is one of the daughters [Fanny Imlay] of that dear Mary Wolstoncroft [*sic*] living with him. She is 19 years of age, very plain, but very sensible. The beauty of her mind fully overbalances the plainness of her countenance. There is another daughter of hers, who is now in Scotland. She is very much like her mother, whose picture hangs up in his study. She must have been a most lovely woman. Her countenance speaks her a woman who would dare to think and act for herself." The daughter in Scotland whom Harriet did not see at that time was Mary Godwin.

In December the correspondence with Hogg is resumed without reference to the past. Hogg, by nature a conformist and reactionary, had evidently reverted to type and thought his former friend would have little patience with his ideas. Shelley replies good-naturedly that "any qualification so involuntary as belief, or opinion, is surely a defective standard by which to measure our esteem. It is only when conviction is influenced by debasing and unworthy motives, that it becomes in any degree criminal." Shelley hastens to add that he accuses Hogg of no such motives, and continues, "You misinterpret my feelings on the state of the moral world, when you suppose that the bigotry of commonplace republicanism, or the violence of action, enters into them at all. I certainly am a very resolved republican (if the word applies) and a determined sceptic; but although I think their reasonings very defective, I am clearly aware that the noblest feelings might conduct some few reflecting minds to Aristocracy and Episcopacy. Hume certainly was an aristocrat, and Locke was a zealous Christian." The words bear the accent of maturity as does, too, his account of his parting with the "Brown Demon" whose stipend he pays "with a heavy heart." He recognizes a certain justice in her claim that it was due to him she lost her former position. That "her reputation is gone, her health ruined, her peace of mind destroyed" by his barbarity is, he remarks, "not all fact," yet "certainly she is embarrassed and poor." He sums her devastatingly as "an artful, superficial, ugly, hermaphroditical, beast of a woman, and my astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency, and bad taste was never so great, as after living four months with her as an inmate. What would Hell be, were such a woman in Heaven?" Shelley made

other mistakes in his reading of human nature but none so gross as his misconception of Elizabeth Hitchener.

Shelley had the lowest possible opinion of Welsh society, which he found "very stupid" and worse. A lady whom he encountered knew Peacock, who had lived in Wales, and spoke of him as " 'hiding his head like a murderer, but,' she added, altering her voice to a tone of appropriate gravity, 'he was *worse than that*, he was an atheist!'" Shelley protested ineffectually against such intolerance. "She knows very well that I am an infidel; but perhaps *she does not do me justice!*" There is more philosophy in one square inch of any tradesman's counter than in the whole of Cambria. It is the last stronghold of the most vulgar and commonplace prejudices of artistocracy. Lawyers of unexampled villainy rule and grind the poor, whilst they cheat the rich. The peasants are mere serfs, and are fed and lodged worse than pigs. The gentry have all the ferocity and despotism of the ancient barons, without their dignity and chivalric disdain of shame and danger. The poor are as abject as samoyads and the rich as tyrannical as bashaws."

Barren as Wales might be of congenial society it afforded Shelley some respite for study. The list of books which he orders from Rickman in London on December 24 reads like a five-foot shelf of the Latin and Greek classics with a miscellaneous collection, philosophical, Oriental, French, and medical equally formidable. Shelley was an omnivorous reader. Few poets have so rich an intellectual background. To trace the influence of so many and so varied works throughout Shelley's prose and poetry is beyond my capacity, but some of especial note, for their apparent influence on his subsequent philosophy, are Diodorus Siculus, Sir William Jones, Lord Monboddo, Berkeley, Spallanzani, Diderot, and Darwin. That Shelley should have ordered the latter's *Temple of Nature* at this time, whether or no for a rereading, suggests its probable influence on *Queen Mab* published early in 1813. Spinoza is mentioned in another order, and Kant. Spinoza is important but it is not apparent that Kant's works were secured at this time, or, if secured, read. Condemnation of Kant by Sir William Drummond, whose *Academical Questions* Shelley admired, may account for this apparent postponement of the study of Kant, either that or Kant's unintelligibility. The point is not without interest inasmuch as Shelley's subsequent philosophy in some points resembles Kant's and derives partly from the same neo-Platonic sources. Shelley requests also, if obtainable, "the famous French *Encyclopédie*," also "a work by a French physician, Cabanis," the

physiological psychologist, a complete necessitarian materialist whose doctrine is to the effect that the brain secretes thought as the liver, bile. Shelley in these so varied works, mystical and materialistic, was preparing himself for the problem which was to occupy the rest of his life, the reconciliation, in some consistent scheme, of mysticism and materialism, free-will and determinism, religion and science.

A letter to Hogg of December 27 discusses two topics of great interest, Napoleon, then in retreat from Moscow, and the trial by which Leigh Hunt was condemned to imprisonment for a libel on the Prince Regent. Shelley says of Napoleon: "Buonaparte is a person to whom I have a very great objection; he is to me a hateful and despicable being. He is seduced by the grossest and most vulgar ambition into actions which only differ from those of pirates by virtue of the number of men and the variety of resources under his command. His talents appear to me altogether contemptible and commonplace; incapable as he is of comparing connectedly the most obvious propositions, or of relishing any pleasure truly enrapturing. Excepting Lord Castlereagh, you could not have mentioned any character but Buonaparte whom I condemn and abhor more vehemently." Of Lord Brougham's defense of the Hunts Shelley remarks that "Entire liberty of speech was denied. He could not speak treason; he could not commit a libel; and therefore his client was not to be defended on the basis of moral truth. He was compelled to hesitate when truth was rising to his lips; he could utter that which he did utter only by circumlocution and irony. The speech of the Solicitor-General appeared to me the consummation of all shameless insolence, and the address of Lord Ellenborough so barefaced a piece of timeservingness, that I am sure his heart must have laughed at his lips as he pronounced it." The Hunt libel arose out of the sycophantic praise of the Regent by the Tory press, the comment upon which was: "This Adonis in Loveliness *was a corpulent gentleman of fifty! In short that this delightful, blissful, wise, pleasurable, honourable, virtuous, true, and immortal PRINCE was a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in debt and disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity.*" The law did not permit the defendant to plead in defense of this characterization its complete truth to fact.

Letters to Hookham, the publisher, in December and January

contain demands for books and references to *Queen Mab*. "I certainly wish to have all Kant's works. My question concerning the 'Encyclopédie' was more of curiosity than a want. I expect to have 'Queen Mab' and the other Poems finished by March. 'Queen Mab' will be in ten cantos, and contain about 2,600 lines." He had two weeks earlier characterized these works as "in a great measure, abrupt and obscure—all breathing hatred of Government and religion, but, I think, not too openly for publication. One fault they are indisputably exempt from, that of being a volume of *fashionable literature*." To this not inappropriately may be added a comment of Harriet's written Miss Nugent upon the Godwins from whom the Shelleys had departed rather abruptly in London. It can hardly be doubted that her opinion was also Shelley's: "Godwin... is changed, and [filled] with prejudices, and besides, too, he expects such universal homage from all persons younger than himself, that it is very disagreeable to be in company with him on that account." It seems that he desired Shelley to join the Whig party, "which made me," says Harriet, "very angry." Godwin, in the eyes of youth, had "grown old and unimpassioned, and therefore is not in the least calculated for such enthusiasts as we are. He has suffered a great deal for his principles, but that ought to make him more staunch in them, at least it would me." Harriet was, at this time, the perfect convert. Shelley could hardly do less than dedicate *Queen Mab* to her. But before taking up the consideration of that poem it would be well to conclude with the few remaining letters from Wales.

The correspondence with Hogg has to do with a proposed visit, with the affairs of the embankment, "in which I thoughtlessly engaged," and with the beauties of the scenery. "Mab," he writes, "has gone on but slowly, although she is nearly finished. They have teased me out of all poetry. With some restrictions I have taken your advice, though I have not been able to bring myself to rhyme. The didactic is in blank heroic verse, and the descriptive in blank lyrical measure. If an authority is of any weight in support of this singularity, Milton's 'Samson Agonistes,' the Greek Choruses, and (you will laugh) Southey's 'Thalaba' may be adduced.... I have finished the rough sketch of my poem. As I have not abated an iota of the infidelity or cosmopolity of it, sufficient will remain, exclusively of innumerable faults, invisible to partial eyes, to make it very unpopular. Like all egotists, I shall console myself with what I may call, if I please, the suffrages of the chosen few, who can think and feel, or of those friends whose personal partialities may blind them to all defects. I

mean to subjoin copious philosophical notes." In the same letter he remarks that "your letters delight me but all your principles do not," and reproves a pride which is "incapable of bearing the test of reason." Such "chivalric pride," he observes, "although of excellent use in an age of Vandalism and brutality, is unworthy of the nineteenth century. A more elevated spirit has begun to diffuse itself . . . and scarce suffers true Passion and true Reason to continue at war. Pride mistakes a desire of being esteemed for that of being really estimable. I scarce think that the mock humility of ecclesiastical hypocrisy is more degrading and blind. . . . Perhaps you will say that my Republicanism is proud; it certainly is far removed from pot-house democracy, and knows with what smile to hear the servile applauses of an inconsistent mob. But though its cheeks could feel without a blush the hand of insult strike, its soul would shrink neither from the scaffold nor the stake, nor from those deeds and habits which are obnoxious to slaves in power. My Republicanism, it is true, would bear with an aristocracy of chivalry and refinement before an aristocracy of commerce and vulgarity; not, however, from pride, but because the one I consider as approaching most nearly to what man ought to be."

On February 19 he writes to Hookham heading a subscription for the Hunts, but one of many instances of Shelley's generosity. The £20 he sent he could very ill afford: "I am boiling with indignation at the horrible injustice and tyranny of the sentence pronounced on Hunt and his brother. . . . Surely the seal of abjectness and slavery is indelibly stamped upon the character of England. . . . Hunt is a brave, a good, and an enlightened man." Surely the public for which Hunt has done so much will rush to his assistance: "or are they dead, cold, stone-hearted, and insensible—brutalized by centuries of unremitting bondage?" Shelley wrote also to Hunt who writes in his *Autobiography*: "It was [this] imprisonment that brought me acquainted with my friend of friends, Shelley. I had seen little of him before." Hunt, though destined, like so many of Shelley's friends, to become a financial liability, at least repaid Shelley's trust in him with loyalty and affection. Of only a few could so much be said.

But one further incident of the brief residence in Wales need be recorded, the assault upon Shelley on the night of February 26 and, as Shelley thought, his attempted assassination. The assailant fired a shot through the window, entered, knocked Shelley down, and escaped. The Shelleys, naturally thinking their lives endangered, left Wales immediately for Ireland, thus realizing the purpose of the

assault. Shelley on his rambles in the mountains was accustomed to shoot badly diseased sheep to put them out of their suffering. A sheep farmer named Evan determined, therefore, to drive Shelley from the neighborhood. The true facts came to general knowledge only in 1905 and are important in that they show Shelley to have been under no such delusion as was long believed by Peacock and others. Peacock made it the chief instance among his anecdotes designed to prove that Shelley was frequently subject to delusions and thus gave support to a legend which is still very much alive. Other of Peacock's instances have not been so happily disproved, there being no evidence but Peacock's assertions. Without charging Peacock with deliberate misrepresentation, such as can be proved in the case of Hogg, it can be plausibly urged that in a few instances Shelley was pulling Peacock's leg. I do not myself greatly admire Shelley's humor from the few instances of it extant, but I think him capable of deriving pleasure from testing his friend's credulity. Peacock, though admiring Shelley's powers, seems to have regarded him as an irresponsible genius and so depicts him in *Nightmare Abbey*. Shelley was quite competent to perceive Peacock's notion of him and to play upon the misconception. Certainly the letters thus far quoted reveal Shelley as an extremely rational, however passionate, creature. The Hitchener episode is about the most foolish misadventure with which he can be charged and this occurred when he was only twenty. That Shelley, who was highly imaginative, was occasionally the victim of his own imaginings is likely enough. But that he suffered from such delusions as Peacock describes seems unlikely and capable of an alternative explanation. Hogg's deliberate falsification of Shelley's character has been shown. The "delusions," I believe, like the report of Mark Twain's death, were in the telling greatly exaggerated.



## CHAPTER VI

### *Queen Mab*



SHELLEY had written to Hookham in August of 1812 that, "The Past, the Present, and the Future, are the grand and comprehensive topics of this poem [*Queen Mab*];" and in December, writing to the same correspondent, says, "Subjoined is a list of books which I wish you to send me very soon. I am determined to apply myself to a study that is hateful and disgusting to my very soul, but which is, above all studies, necessary for him who would be listened to as a mender of antiquated abuses. I mean that record of crimes and miseries, History." Such was the conception of the ardent reformers of the pre-Revolutionary period of whom Shelley is so curiously a belated disciple. The past he meant to do in the spirit of Volney's *Ruins*, revealing the sins by which fell the empires of antiquity, and like Volney looking to a glorious future when mankind, having learned its lesson at last, after repeated failures, should establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. In *Queen Mab* Shelley summed up all the idealism of his adolescence, his ardor for reform, his dreams of a perfected human society. It was, it seems, obsolescent in some respects even as he wrote it; it is the expression of a phase of his development already ended. Yet it was necessary to him that he write it, however crude to his rapidly maturing judgment it already seemed. It is not that he disbelieved what he wrote but that his mind was already occupied with deeper questions, metaphysical problems underlying the origins of man's sins and social failures. The evidence of his groping for answers to the central questions of ethics and metaphysics is written in the somewhat confused thought of the poem, his belief in mutually contradictory philosophies. The inherent contradiction was not yet apparent to him. He but felt it.

*Queen Mab* is a work for which Shelley later professed little regard, writing of it to Ollier, June 11, 1821, that "I have not seen it for some years, but inasmuch as I recollect it is villainous trash; and I dare say much better fitted to injure than to serve the cause which it advocates. In the name of poetry, and as you are a bookseller . . . pray give all manner of publicity to my disapprobation of this publication." This comment was provoked by a pirated printing of the

poem, the only one of Shelley's works ever to attain such a distinction. Unlike his better poetry, *Queen Mab* enjoyed some popularity in his day. [The Chartists later found in it and in the works of Tom Paine inspiration to the radical protests of the mid-century. In Shelley and in Paine the revolutionary spirit lived on when the literature which inspired them both was largely forgotten. Godwin is remembered largely because it was *Political Justice* which happened to convert Shelley to radicalism at a turning point in his life. The *Rights of Man* and *Queen Mab* live because they summarize, readably, the radical thought of a half century. The poem which Shelley thought so little of has, therefore, its intrinsic importance. More, it is a summary of ideas which though in it often contradictory and inconsistent one with another are the ideas from which Shelley built his ultimate philosophy. Before he came of age the social and philosophical speculations which were the preoccupation of his maturity were nascent in his thought. It is not surprising that, intellectually precocious though he was, he could not at once fit them to an adequate philosophy.]

Technically the poem is important also as the first of Shelley's exercises in verse which displays promise of the poetry he was later to write. His youthful rhymes are hardly more than mediocre. It is in prose that he is first adept. The letters which have thus far been liberally quoted reveal a rapidly growing power of eloquence and force. The unrhymed verse of *Queen Mab* is transitional from prose to poetry. It, too, is eloquent, if no more, a kind of poetic or oratorical prose; it is to poetry what recitative in opera is to an aria. Its elocutionary character is its most notable characteristic. Trelawny was of the opinion that Shelley's eloquence as a talker, had it been directed to larger audiences, would have made him a great orator. Power of thought and expression may be directed to varied ends as circumstances determine. Shelley would have attained distinction as natural scientist, philosopher, political scientist, or orator had the accidents of his life so guided him. It happened that his great natural abilities found their ultimate expression in poetry, in which his other aptitudes, though evident, are secondary to that fusion of thought, emotion, and rhythmical mastery which constitutes great verse. In philosophical poetry he best realized the full range of his powers.

*Queen Mab* is, together with a brief dedication to Harriet, in nine cantos. Echoes, we may believe, to adopt an image from *Prometheus*, can anticipate sounds yet unheard. So the opening lines of *Queen Mab* anticipate a later lyric more exquisitely phrased:

## 104 Theosophical Implications of *Queen Mab*

How wonderful is Death,  
Death, and his brother Sleep!

Shelley's fondness for certain images and symbols and his repeated use of them in a form increasingly adequate to his thought is one of his marked characteristics as a poet, one helpful in understanding him, for the recondite figures of his later employment are intelligible when their ancestry is traced. The apostrophe to Death and Sleep preludes a description of the sleeping Ianthe to whom comes the Fairy Queen charioted by her "celestial coursers." The imagery of the passage employs many terms familiar in Shelley's subsequent usage: the phenomena of air, clouds, moon, star, breezes, rainbow; epithets such as "silvery," "pearly," "pellucid," "heavenly." The Fairy Queen descends and waves her magic wand over the sleeping maid and calls upon the soul of Ianthe to awake:

Sudden arose  
Ianthe's Soul; it stood  
All beautiful in naked purity,  
The perfect semblance of its bodily frame;  
Instinct with inexpressible beauty and grace—  
Each stain of earthliness  
Had passed away—it reassumed  
Its native dignity and stood  
Immortal amid ruin.

There are evident in these lines influences which are Platonic, mystical, and Oriental, these enforced by the stanza following which describes the soul as the image of the slumbering body but as aspiring to heaven and panting for its "sempiternal heritage"; as "ever rising" to wanton "in endless being" while the transient body "rots, perishes, and passes." In the terms of Theosophy it is the astral body which is awakened to view the wonders about to be revealed, the astral body which is a tenuous simulacrum of the physical body. This, however, in the terminology of a somewhat different philosophy, is called the soul and imperishable, which the astral body is not. Its immortality, its momentary imprisonment in the body, suggest that Shelley is thinking here, rather loosely, in terms of Platonism, and that by the "soul" he means more precisely the intellectual personality preëxistent to birth and immortal, for which the body is a brief abiding place in the endless course of spiritual evolution. The language seems to imply that this "soul" is resident

within the bodily frame rather than enveloping it as is the belief of Theosophy. Shelley seems to me in the passage to effect an eclectic synthesis of ideas which he got from Plato and the neo-Platonists and from some Oriental source, perhaps the translations of Sir William Jones or similar works. In lore of this kind, as many later instances in Shelley's verse will demonstrate, it is impossible to detect the precise source of Shelley's ideas though, broadly, their mystical and occult character is evident enough.

The Spirit of Ianthe is summoned by the Fairy Mab to witness, as a reward of her purity, the wonders of the past and future which it is within the Fairy's power to reveal. The past is treasured in the consciences of men, the future may be read from causes existent in the present. It is to instruct Ianthe's Spirit in the way "to accomplish the great end for which it hath its being," that it is freed—as a reward but seemingly also as an incentive. The lines have their philosophic difficulties. The future is seemingly predetermined and yet Ianthe is to be shown to her advantage how best to act. The evident conflict is that between free-will and necessity, one which reappears and therefore may better be argued at a later point. The Spirit of Ianthe ascends in the chariot to the accompaniment of "speechless music"—again a phrase with mystical connotations—and the journey through the starry firmament is described with details of considerable scientific interest:

The atmosphere in flaming sparkles flew,  
And where the burning wheels  
Eddied above the mountain's loftiest peak,  
Was traced a line of lightning.

The electrical phenomena attendant upon the car's flight are of particular note because of the important place which electricity later occupies in Shelley's conception of matter and force as expressed in *Prometheus*. Letters from which excerpts have been quoted show that Shelley had been recently reading both Erasmus Darwin and Humphry Davy from either of whom the concept of force as electric may have been derived. The use made here of the idea is slight but is prophetic of Shelley's subsequent employment of it. Likewise the description of the car's path through the million constellations of the "black concave," parting the light like the sun's rays and casting it aside like foam, is a passage whose visual power is solidly based on knowledge of Herschel's astronomy. Herschel in his explorations and star counts by means of more power-

ful telescopes than ever before made had measured the stellar universe in millions of light years, and had moreover observed suns in various stages of their evolution. Shelley's descriptions of them in the variety of their light from those "hornéd like the crescent moon" to those "with trains of flame" suggest his knowledge of the variety of the stellar scene. So, too, the lines which depict the "million constellations" as

...semicircled with a belt  
Flashing incessant meteors

suggest the theory of meteors entering the universe from outer space. I would not from these conceptions suggest that Shelley knew more of astronomy than might be learned from Laplace, Herschel's papers read before the Royal Society, and such semipopular scientific magazines as *Nicholson's Journal*. So much as this would sufficiently attest his scientific interest and the wide and varied character of his reading; suggest, too, that his imagination was stimulated by his knowledge of science. Even so young as he was, the wonder, complexity, and variety of the physical universe had laid hold on him. There is nothing in his writing prior to this description of a journey through space equal to it in imaginative force and splendor. He apostrophizes the Spirit of Nature whose "fitting temple" is this sublime universe of constellations. But it is the unity of nature more than its immensity which compels his adoration, for "the lightest leaf" and "the meanest worm" likewise share the "eternal breath."

Beyond the "constellated wilderness" of the stars is the home of the Fairy, described in terms of a sunset at sea in which the glory of the sky is reflected in the water beneath. It is a place of radiant light whose battlements overlook "the immense of heaven." It is a place that "mocks all human grandeur," a place of bliss; but the virtuous spirit does not yield to its charms, for then "the will of changeless nature would be unfulfilled" which is to "learn to make others happy." The highest reward offered the Spirit of lanthe is to behold the past and present and learn "the secrets of the future." The Fairy conducting the Spirit to the battlement overhanging space points to the speck which is the earth among the host of stars whose "circling systems" form "a wilderness of harmony." There "the Spirit's intellectual eye," exempt from limitations of "matter, space, and time," perceives not only the activities of the human ant-hill but the passions and thoughts which animate each and which are also links "in the great chain of nature." The Spirit surveys the ruins of

dead empires, Palmyra, Egypt, Salem, Athens, Rome, and Sparta,  
empires reared on human blood and misery, worshipping demon-gods.

... Oh! they were fiends!  
But what was he who taught them that the God  
Of nature and benevolence had given  
A special sanction to the trade of blood?

The barbarities and great names of the past are alike fading to oblivion. So, too, Athens and Rome are places where now "a coward and a fool spreads death around" or "a cowed and hypocritical monk prays, curses, and deceives." Where ten thousand years ago rose the "metropolis of the western continent" all is now desert, for "wealth, that curse of man, blighted" the city and "virtue and wisdom, truth and liberty fled," no more to return.

The earth is a mausoleum in which there is no spot "whereon no city stood"; nor is there "one atom of yon earth but once was living man," nor a "drop of rain... but flowed in human veins." The Fairy contemplating the wreck of man's achievements, exclaims:

"How strange is human pride!  
I tell thee that those living things,  
To whom the fragile blade of grass  
That springeth in the morn  
And perisheth ere noon,  
Is an unbounded world;  
I tell thee that those viewless beings,  
Whose mansion is the smallest particle  
Of the impassive atmosphere,  
Think, feel and live like man;  
That their affections and antipathies,  
Like his, produce the laws  
Ruling their moral state..."

It is an odd conjunction. Volney's melancholy eloquence lamenting the fall of empires is banished by the wonders of microscopy, for the tiny creatures invisible to the eye are likewise a part of universal nature. Shelley endows them on authority of his own or derived other than from Spallanzani with human thoughts and passions. The suggestion is perhaps derived from Paracelsus, with his gnomes and sylphs and nymphs and salamanders animating the four elements, or from other pseudo-scientists and occultists. The interest of the passage lies not so much in the source of its indebtedness as in the character

of the imagination it reveals, the mixture of scientific curiosity with an instinctive animism. The world of Shelley's conception is wholly alive, wholly expressive of nature's unity, but his pantheism, if it can be called such, stresses rather the individuality of the component parts than the spirit common to all. It is the multiplicity of nature's unity which intrigues him. I believe this to be a fact important to an understanding of Shelley. The animated universe of his subsequent and greater verse displays the same imaginative faculty which endows even inanimate things with a peculiar and characteristic life. In Shelley existed, along with his critical intellect, a primitive power of animating the common phenomena of earth, a power kin to that of the myth-makers in the dawn of the human imagination.

From the spectacle of the past the Spirit of Ianthe derives "a lesson not to be unlearned . . . a warning for the future." The Fairy turns therefore to the contemplation of the present. The unhappy lot of a King is revealed, surrounded by his troops, neither "free nor happy . . . the fool whom courtiers nickname monarch," heedless of the curses of the fatherless and the grief of the friendless. He is a prey to base appetites and smiles at the groans of the destitute. If gold could bring happiness it would be his, but he longs vainly for rest. His sleep is haunted by fearful dreams. He can find no peace. The hell of conscience that he suffers is worse than that created by bigots. But he, like his suffering subjects, is the creature of precedent and custom. And what of courtiers, the gilded flies that fatten on corruption? They spring from vice, treachery, and wrong. When reason's voice shall have waked the nations, kings and courtiers will disappear; they are but transient. The virtuous man at his death leaves a deathless memory which causes kings to tremble. "Nature rejects the monarch, not the man; the subject, not the citizen." The virtuous man neither commands nor obeys. It is not Nature but Man that is the cause of human woe. Of Nature's works all but the "outcast, Man" are given to peace and joy. Man, for some perverse reason not clearly specified, devotes himself to warfare and tyranny. The Spirit of Nature which pervades the universe will, however, ultimately prevail even in man. Peace will come to him and the "unbounded frame" of the universe "will be without a flaw." The passage, I suspect, is of earlier composition than other parts of the poem, being more youthful and wild. In the years 1810-1813 Shelley matured rapidly. *Queen Mab* is a kind of summary of his thought in these years of ferment. Adolescence and manhood are inextricably mixed in it. Denunciation, being the easiest form of composition,

is presumptively expressive of the youthful phase. Not that Shelley ever wholly relinquished it, but in his mature works it is far more restrained than in *Queen Mab* and therefore far more effective. †

‡Canto IV, which succeeds the denunciation of kings and courtiers, contrasts the peace and beauty of nature with the destructiveness of man.) The burning of Moscow and Napoleon's retreat is the particular theme of the description, at whose horror the Spirit of Ianthe is aghast. But is Nature responsible for man's depravity? No, "Kings, priests, and statesmen blast the human flower." The child is trained from the cradle to "pride of crime, and lifts his baby-sword even in a hero's mood." The child is the product of a vicious education and of the injustice of social institutions. The natural good in him is perverted by the forces which surround him. Shelley's lines are a metrical paraphrase of Godwin's *Political Justice*.

There follows a passage of considerably greater interest, an expression of Shelley's pantheism or Platonism, whichever it may be:

Throughout this varied and eternal world  
Soul is the only element, the block  
That for uncounted ages has remained.  
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight  
Is active living spirit. Every grain  
Is sentient both in unity and part,  
And the minutest atom comprehends  
A world of loves and hatreds; these beget  
Evil and good; hence truth and falsehood spring;  
Hence will, and thought, and action, all the germs  
Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate,  
That variegate the eternal universe.  
Soul is not more polluted than the beams  
Of heaven's pure orb ere round their rapid lines  
The taint of earth-born atmospheres arise.

I cannot extract any consistency from these lines, but they are nevertheless revelatory of Shelley's thought, and the paradoxes presented are not without significance. He had in an earlier passage celebrated the unity of all life, even the microscopic life of "viewless beings." He now goes further. "Every grain" of supposedly inanimate matter he declares to be sentient. There is no reality but soul. The minutest atom "comprehends a world of loves and hatreds." Nature is wholly unified, without distinction of animate and inanimate. Materialism would seem to be wholly repudiated.



How then are we to account for evil in the universe? He has previously said that evil is not inherent in nature but is man's creation. The child is by nature good but is educated in evil by the forces of tradition and bigotry. Man alone is the outcast from loving nature. Yet he now declares that nature herself, animate to the last atom, "comprehends a world of loves and hatreds." All is soul, but in the soul exist love and hate. Evil, then, cannot be man's creation solely but is inherent in the soul itself, which is Nature. Shelley would seem here to be fumbling for an expression of Manicheism, resolving the universe to a conflict of the two everlasting principles, Ahriman and Ormuzd. Or again he may be wrestling with the problem posed by the Platonists: how account for the presence of evil in a world which is the creation of the wholly perfect One? The impact of this weightier philosophy upon the naïve metaphysics of Godwin creates no more than confusion and a blinding cloud of dust. If there is any means by which a reconciliation may be effected between philosophies seemingly so wholly at odds, Shelley has not yet found it; is not even aware of the incompatibility of the two solutions which he advances of the problem of evil. The interest of *Queen Mab* lies not in any answer to such ultimates, a task too great for any youth however great a genius, but in revealing the philosophic materials with which Shelley's mind was stuffed. He pours them in all their profusion and richness before us.

Man, in the words of the Fairy, is "formed for deeds of high resolve" or "for abjectness and woe." The one is what he "shall hereafter be"; the other, what "vice has made him now." Whereupon there follows a fierce denunciation of war, which is "the statesman's game, the priest's delight, the lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade." It is well to remember that Shelley's childhood and youth were passed in a world continuously at war. Two years subsequent to the publication of *Queen Mab*, came the treaty which ended the Napoleonic wars and introduced a peace almost worse than war itself. Shelley's tirades are ineffective not because they are untrue—for the world which he described is an actual world of carnage and corruption, physical, moral, and spiritual—but ineffective because they are rhetorical, because they fail in quiet understatement of horrors which it is futile to describe save in understatement. Rulers and priests are the causes of this woe which is endless. One generation arises to be reaped by destruction, and another succeeds whose fate is the same. Shelley's eloquent lines which read like the fulminations of some radical demagogue leave me, for one, tepid. Why? I do not doubt

the accuracy of his picture, save his ascription of man's woe wholly to priests and kings, an important qualification to be sure. Nor do I believe that Shelley is insincere. It is true he had read such denunciations elsewhere, but he also read the daily newspaper and saw in the life about him proof that they were justified. The fault lies in the method. The writing though eloquent and facile is not wholly good. It fails a little in that it raves. Yet it would be mistaken to dismiss it as of no importance, for it is authentic Shelley in its perception of the world's actualities. Shelley was a visionary not because he failed to see life as it is but because, unable wholly to bear the sight, he turned to Utopian visions of what the world might be. The Shelley who shrieks is the Shelley of *Queen Mab*. He learned soon that shrieks are ineffective. He learned, too, that to remove the evils of the world it is necessary to do more than to do away with kings, and priests, and courtiers. In his subsequent works he sought the root of evil more profoundly, but manifestations of that evil he saw clearly from the beginning.

The "suicidal selfishness" of man, he asserts, "is destined to decay." All virtue will spring from the past's corruption. Selfishness is the "twin-sister of religion." From it "commerce springs," commerce which stifles the natural instincts of helpfulness to others. Gold is the driving force of human society. The poor are the wretched slaves of wealth, which deprives them of the exercise of their native powers. "Nature . . . has gifted man with all-subduing will" but the inequality of man's lot prevents its exercise. To many a Newton the stars are "only specks of tinsel . . . to light the midnights of his native town." Yet man might become more than the mightiest in wisdom and intellect have ever been, for "every heart contains perfection's germ." A being to be subdued only by death is by the venality of the world corrupted and enthralled. Love itself is sold and the "slave-soldier lends his arm to murderous deeds." Yet selfishness is to end; it has felt its death-blow. Poverty and wealth, the desire for fame, "the fear of infamy, disease, and woe," and "war with its million horrors" are destined to pass away. The assertion falls a little tamely upon the ear. Why are these evils destined to disappear? The "eternal world," the Fairy responds in answer to the Spirit's question, "contains at once the evil and the cure." Even in the worst of times "some eminent in virtue shall start up" and the truths they utter shall never die. The Spirit of Ianthe is assured that earth is to become "of purest spirits a pure dwelling-place . . . when man with changeless nature coalescing, will undertake regeneration's work." This is to be—

## The Problem of a Golden Age

When its ungenial poles no longer point  
To the red and baleful sun  
That faintly twinkles there!

A long and interesting note on this passage presents matter derived from the astronomers Laplace and Bailly to the effect that the obliquity of the earth's axis "will gradually diminish until the equator coincides with the ecliptic." Shelley looks then to equality of the seasons. The restoration of a mild and equable climate may be accompanied by a progress of the intellect equally rapid, the evolution of man in thought and goodness keeping pace with the climatic improvements of earth. Once, he points out from the evidences of paleontology, the polar regions were habitable and may be so again.

The influence of a number of sources is manifest in these lines; besides the astronomers, Erasmus Darwin in his account of earthly evolution; and suggested, too, traditions of the golden age. Shelley is struggling with a number of related but recalcitrant ideas. How, if nature is good, has man come to be so bad? Priests and kings are the cause. So Shelley repeats without wholehearted conviction, for other possibilities arise. Whence the legend of a golden age? Perhaps the world was once better suited to man's habitation than now and the present discord between man and nature may have astronomical and climatic causes. It would seem, if this is true, that nature is at fault for the disharmony rather than man, but Shelley refuses to admit the implication despite the Necessitarian doctrine which he later professes. Here again he reveals a facet of the many-sided problem of evil which was perplexing him. Evolutionary ideas derived from Erasmus Darwin, Laplace, and Parkinson, the paleontologist, are subconsciously at war with ideas incompatible with them, ideas subscribing to revelation. That the revelation is Godwinian rather than Biblical makes it none the less irreconcilable with evolutionary science.

¶ He turns aside from the avenue suggested by the obliquity of the earth's axis to an unwearied denunciation of religion, showing wherein it distorts the mind from infancy to manhood and in doing so he confuses the natural anthropomorphic aptitudes of the mind with the restrictive bonds of revealed religion and ritual. It is his own fancies which he seems to renounce when he describes the stars as gods to the child's imagination, and the trees, the grass, the sea, the mountains, and all living things likewise as gods. To the boy "more daring" in his "frenzies, every shape monstrous or vast or beautifully wild," and "the spirits of the air," ghosts, "the genii of

the elements," and the powers which "give a shape to nature's varied works, had life and place in the corrupt belief of thy blind heart." Surely here, in a passion of renunciation brought on by his conversion to reason and her works, he is sacrificing the poetic and imaginative gifts with which he was endowed. Shelley was converted to reason and Necessity as people of different mind are converted to Mormonism or Methodism. The passion to renounce all the depravities which he had practiced before he was saved is the same in him as in them. It is evident that the conversion was only for a time. He backslid egregiously, for the exercise of the imagination and its endowment of all forces and all objects with a characteristic life was as much a necessity to his mind as the exercise of reason itself. *Queen Mab* itself declares the very faculties which he forswore.

Consistency is not the most striking characteristic of *Queen Mab*. Religion and all the gods he wholly repudiates and condemns only to praise the "Spirit of activity" which animates the universe, a spirit which he otherwise characterizes as—

Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,  
Necessity! thou mother of the world!

The gods of paganism and the God of revealed religion are dethroned and Necessity set in their place. Shelley was born a generation too late, for he should have shared in the worship of Reason established in the mad days of the Revolution. *Queen Mab*, published in 1813, is an anachronism. Its language is of an earlier day. Yet the worship of Necessity which Shelley declares in verse and buttresses with citations from Holbach is in one sense, whatever its philosophical difficulties, intelligible enough. It is but the substitution of the reign of law for the reign of whim, of science for religion. (Shelley with his scientific bent and his humanitarian hatred of the crimes committed in the name of religion found refuge in the worship of "unalterable law.") The personification of this abstract deity rings poetically rather hollow, perhaps, but the confused emotion back of it is intelligible. The God still professedly worshiped by Christians was a jealous God, a God of wrath and battles; moreover he was a whimsical God capable of intruding upon the operations of his universe by miraculous interventions. Shelley was too scientific-minded to believe in such a deity.

The poem proceeds to the demolition of the God who under various names serves "for desolation's watchword." All misery, all cruelty is practiced in his name who makes "the earth a slaughter-house"—an image and a phrase borrowed from Erasmus Darwin. The

shade of Ahasuerus is summoned by the Fairy to bear witness to this malign God who planted evil in the hearts of men and damned them to eternity for being as he had made them. One way to salvation only remains to those so fortunate as to be born after the incarnation of God as one who veiled "his horrible Godhead in the shape of man" and taught "justice, truth, and peace, in semblance." In semblance only, for the Incarnate lit within the souls of men "the quenchless flames of zeal," he "blessed the sword . . . to satiate with the blood of truth and freedom his malignant soul." On the cross, mocked by the words of Ahasuerus, "a smile of godlike malice reilluminated his fading lineaments" and he condemned his mocker to wander over the earth eternally, there to witness the bloodshed and crime committed in the name of religion. But Ahasuerus thus doomed to eternal agony remains "peaceful and serene . . . mocking" his "powerless tyrant's horrible curse with stubborn and unalterable will." The conception of Shelley's earlier *Wandering Jew* has become altered in the figure of Ahasuerus to one recognizably the prototype of Prometheus, he who, condemned to all but eternal suffering by God, is greater than God in his rectitude and his command of his own soul. The theme of *Prometheus Unbound* is thus announced in *Queen Mab*. Its development, its philosophic content, was, however, the work of some years, during which Shelley's conception of Christ was very greatly to alter. In the notes to *Queen Mab* Shelley remarks: "I have seen reason to suspect that Jesus was an ambitious man who aspired to the throne of Judea." This idea and that of Jesus as a "hypocritical demon" who pretended compassion and peace while provoking men to war, he later wholly repudiated. Shelly's philosophy was continually evolving.

† The evils of the past and present constitute the larger part of *Queen Mab* but there is a sufficiently ample picture of the radiant future in which earth is no longer hell. | Man is in harmony with his world. His life and that of the planetary spheres move to music, a Pythagorean or Rosicrucian idea which Shelley later amplified in *Prometheus*. The earth is a place of peace; its frozen wastes have become warm and habitable. The deserts have become fertile; the peaceful ocean is gemmed with sunny islands. It is a place of eternal summer. The lion has forgotten his "thirst for blood" and plays "beside the dreadless kid." Man, moreover, "ambiguous man," who is either the "burthen or the glory of the earth," perceives the changes in his world and responds to them. Man, once a miserable, diseased, and base being is now one "with taintless body and mind." He no

longer "slays the lamb . . . and horribly devours his mangled flesh," which practice kindled in him "all putrid humors . . . all evil passions." Man and animal are at peace amid universal vegetarianism; Man "stands an equal amidst equals." Happiness and science rule the world and "every shape and mode of matter lends its force to the omnipotence of mind." The passage is not greatly altered in the later version of the same ideas in *Prometheus*.

The happy earth has become the "reality of Heaven," which is the "glorious prize of blindly-working will." Yet Shelley has previously extolled the Spirit of Nature, which he has also characterized as Necessity. Are all three one and the same? How is it possible to reconcile Necessity with "blindly-working will" or to think of either as the Spirit of Nature? Yet this is but the beginning of the perplexity into which Shelley has led us. The Spirit of Nature, or Necessity, or "blindly-working will" in the course of evolution develops in man, for the attainment of an earthly paradise, the faculty of reason, which he freely exercises. Thus, out of chance or necessity is evolved that which is subject neither to chance nor to necessity. Shelley, it seems, in his scheme of an evolving universe has need to invoke a variety of agents. How may these be reconciled? They are, indeed, incompatible one with another; but it is not evident that, in *Queen Mab*, Shelley is aware of the ambiguity into which the use of these various agents has led him.

The part played by the evolutionary theories of Erasmus Darwin in this assemblage of ideas is not easily assessed. Darwin, whose ideas so fully anticipate Lamarck, gives a detailed account of the evolution of life from the "microscopic ens" to man. Organic life, Darwin says, was born beneath the sea. He thereupon depicts the evolution of forms with circumstantial fullness and much anticipation of later theories. Nature, the child of God, the first cause, who is also Love, is the origin of the evolutionary process:

From embryo births her changeful forms improve,  
Grow, as they live, and strengthen as they move.

Darwin is not so explicit as could be wished in defining the means of evolution, the parts played by Necessity, or external pressure, on the one hand and by the innate impulse, the striving for perfection at the instigation of nature, on the other. It is to the latter, however, that he inferentially describes the aspiration to improvement. In his discussion of good and evil in the fourth canto of *The Temple of Nature*

occurs a passage which perhaps explains Shelley's use of the phrase "blindly-working will":

Thy acts, VOLITION, to the world impart  
 The plans of Science with the works of art;  
 Give to proud Reason her comparing power,  
 Warm every clime, and brighten every hour.  
 In Life's first cradle, ere the dawn began  
 Of young Society to polish man;  
 The staff that propp'd him and the bow that arm'd,  
 The boat that bore him, and the shed that warm'd,  
 Fire, raiment, food, the ploughshare, and the sword,  
 Arose, VOLITION, at thy plastic word.

If I read this aright, will, then, is the motive force in the evolution of life, both in its lower forms and in man. Reason is picked up by the way, so to speak, as a tool for man's uses. The idea has its correspondences also with certain ideas of Godwin's with which Shelley was familiar. Godwin believed that desire or will generates capacity. We will to know and thus create the power to know. He believed that if we willed with sufficient intensity we could learn to do without sleep and vastly lengthen our lives. We die because of failure of the will to live. The "blindly-working will" then may have these origins, though "blindly" would seem more appropriate to the lower forms of life than to man. With his advancement man should, that is, more consciously direct his will to desired ends.

Perhaps Shelley so implies, for man in his emancipated state is described as possessing "courage of soul" and "elevated will" which journeys on "through life's phantasmal scene" hand in hand "with virtue, love, and pleasure." Emancipated men and women no longer need conceal the impulses of love. "Selfish chastity, that virtue of the cheaply virtuous" ceases to be a check on love's expression. "Prostitution's venom'd bane" no longer poisons the "springs of happiness and life." The influence of Lawrence's *Empire of the Nairs* is evident in this and in Shelley's later pictures of a virtuous promiscuity. This is Shelley's conception of the free love which is, in the minds of many, the inevitable associate of gross sensuality and social radicalism. Its freedom from gross sensuality is evident in Shelley's first depiction of it. It is Shelley's notion of the kingdom of heaven which is without marriage or giving in marriage. With the picture of this future Eden before her, the Spirit of Ianthe is admonished not to fear "death's disrobing hand." Death is "but the voyage of a

darksome hour" and "the transient gulf-dream of a startling sleep"; it is "no foe to virtue." The Spirit of Ianthe is told—

... thy will  
Is destined an eternal war to wage  
With tyranny and falsehood, and uproot  
The germs of misery from the human heart.

With this admonition and prophecy the Spirit is borne in the Fairy's chariot back to its earthly abode where—

The Body and the Soul united then.

I have been, as it may seem to some, at over-great pains to bring out the ideas of a poem which Shelley later dismissed as worthless; I do so because of its importance as summing up the first phase of Shelley's thought. Manifestly it abounds with contradictions and anomalies. It expresses not so much a philosophy as the ideas for which an embracing philosophy must be fashioned. So philosophies are presumably made. Ideas accumulated from various sources are the materials from which the philosophic mind builds its dwelling place. The ideas are such as appeal to the mind, are such as it must or would like to believe. The problem is to unite them in seemly fashion. Shelley's materials are clearly diverse and not easily reconcilable one with another. He has professed a belief that all matter is animated. It feels, thinks, loves, and hates. The spirit which animates it is the Spirit of Nature. It is, however, governed by Necessity. Every least thought, as every least movement of matter, is the consequence of causes and cannot be other than it is. Yet in its blind gropings the force of life achieves reason and develops a conscious will with which it wages an eternal war with the environment which hampers it. There is, moreover, also a soul as well as a body, for the soul of Ianthe is freed from the body and returns to it. There is the statement that death is not to be dreaded, that spirit is immortal. Matter and soul, Necessity and will—the poet believes in all of them. He believes, too, in evolution, in the attainment and development both of reason and of the individual will which becomes master of and subdues the forces hostile to it. How are beliefs so diverse, so seemingly at odds, to be rationalized? It is not apparent in *Queen Mab* that the poet is aware how elaborate a system of metaphysics is needed to reconcile them.

The philosophy which Shelley avows in *Queen Mab* is largely necessitarian and materialistic. But the beliefs that all matter lives,



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that spirit is immortal, that there is soul as well as body, are of a different origin. What shall be made of this passage?

Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue  
 The gradual paths of an aspiring change;  
 For birth and life and death, and that strange state  
 Before the naked soul has found its home,  
 All tend to perfect happiness, and urge  
 The restless wheels of being on their way,  
 Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,  
 Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal;  
 For birth but wakes the spirit to the sense  
 Of outward shows, whose unexperienced shape  
 New modes of passion to its frame may lend;  
 Life is its state of action, and the store  
 Of all events is aggregated there  
 That variegate the eternal universe;  
 Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,  
 That leads to azure isles and beaming skies  
 And happy regions of eternal hope.

This is sheer Platonism in its belief in a preëxistence and in the discipline of life as needful to the soul's education. The "outward shows," too, with its implication of a reality behind the shows, is clearly Platonistic. We have, then, in the mind of the youthful Shelley these chief strains of philosophy: materialistic determinism; evolution, both spiritual and physical; belief in the animation of all matter; belief in the importance of reason to man's achievement of his destiny; belief in the power of the will to resist the forces hostile to advancement; belief in man's attainment of a heaven on earth in his ultimate mastery of himself and of his world. The Platonism, which is evident in but a few passages of *Queen Mab*, was destined to become the solvent which, in Shelley's matured philosophy, blent these seemingly recalcitrant materials to a unity.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Domestic Distractions*



THE Shelleys fled to Ireland from the supposed assassin in Wales, missed Hogg who journeyed there to meet them, and visited the lakes of Killarney. The correspondence of this time bears witness to Shelley's money troubles as do his subsequent letters written from London and elsewhere. As he was to come of age in August of 1813 some understanding with his father on financial matters was essential, for Shelley was prospective heir to the entailed estate. Relations were not amicable and the son's attempt at a reconciliation which would permit him to see mother and sisters was fruitless. His father insisted as a prerequisite that he renounce his beliefs. Harriet's characterization of her father-in-law as an "old dotard" is no more than just. Fortunately for the son his legal rights were such that ultimately he was able to extort £1000 a year, but this not until the death of his grandfather, old Sir Bysshe. Meanwhile Timothy Shelley contrived to make his son's life as unhappy as want of money and danger of imprisonment for debt could do. It was a distracting time and one not conducive to the production of poetry. An occasional letter and the publication in 1813 of *A Vindication of Natural Diet* and, early in 1814, of *A Refutation of Deism* usually referred to as *Eusebes and Theosophus* are the chief evidences of Shelley's intellectual activity. Apparently he studied assiduously and made translations even when most harassed and distracted. In a letter written from Edinburgh to Hogg (November 26, 1813) he speaks of reading Tacitus and Cicero, and of studying Laplace. "I... am determined not to relax until I have attained considerable proficiency in the physical sciences." He has, he states, translated two of Plutarch's essays. The most interesting part of the letter is his comment on Hume: "I have examined Hume's reasonings with respect to the non-existence of external things, and, I confess, they appear to me to follow from the doctrines of Locke. What am I to think of a philosophy which conducts to such a conclusion?"

[*A Vindication of Natural Diet*, a pamphlet on vegetarianism, is no more than an expansion of the notes on that subject in *Queen Mab*. Shelley had begun his own practice of vegetarianism during his first visit to Dublin in February and March of 1812. Shortly thereafter he

met through the agency of Godwin a Mr. John Newton, author of *The Return to Nature, or a Defence of the Vegetable Regimen*, published in 1811. In this Shelley found medical and anthropological arguments in support of his own practice which he may have taken up for other reasons. His own health, which was insecure, he thought improved by his abstention from animal food. Harriet, too, was a convert. During his London residence in 1813 Shelley became intimate with the Newtons whose circle included Mrs. Boinville, sister of Mrs. Newton, and her daughter Cornelia who taught Shelley Italian. Shelley's pamphlet therefore is the product both of conviction and friendship. The evidences of the wholesome effects of vegetarianism upon his friends strengthened him in his own practice, though, if Peacock and his story of the well-peppered mutton chops are to be believed, Shelley occasionally departed from his vegetable diet.

Presumably there is nothing particularly original in the arguments of the *Vindication* and Shelley is merely endeavoring, with the enthusiasm of a convert, to propagate ideas already advanced. The depravity of man, both moral and physical, originated, he declares, in a departure from a natural way of life. Religions and mythology alike bear witness to this departure which probably coincided with some great change in climate. The allegory of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of evil can mean no other than that "disease and crime . . . have flowed from unnatural diet." The myth of Prometheus likewise allegorizes some great change in human nature, probably the use of fire for cooking, with consequent disease, vice, superstition, and tyranny. Not only did man infect himself by this habit but also the domestic animals. Wild animals (four cited) "are perfectly exempt from malady, and invariably die either from external violence, or natural old age." The problem for man is to combine the advantages of intellect and civilization with the benefits of a natural life. He can do so by "abstinence from animal food and spirituous liquors." The argument proceeds, on the lines of comparative anatomy, that man is naturally frugivorous. The orang-outang, whose teeth most closely resemble man's, is frugivorous. The structure of stomach and intestines in both is similar also. That those accustomed to an animal diet may find it difficult to change is true enough. It is also true that young children prefer a natural diet until habituated to the eating of flesh. With abstention from animal food health returns and the cheerfulness and elasticity of the mind are restored. The morbid action of the animal system can be due to nothing other than an unnatural diet. "Crime is madness. Madness is disease." Remove the

cause of disease and society is renovated. "No sane mind in a sane body resolves upon a real crime." Fermented liquors are the cause of much disease and consequent crime. Had the Parisians drunk from the Seine and eaten vegetables only would they have accepted the proscription list of Robespierre? Was Nero temperate? Had Bonaparte descended from a race of vegetarians he would not have seized tyrannical power. The departure from natural instincts and habits has brought upon the human race disease and irreparable woe.

There is no disease, whether bodily or mental, which has not been mitigated by a diet of vegetables and pure water. On such a diet our only malady would be old age. We should live longer and enjoy life. The senses would be keener, delights greater. He cites evidence from the families of Dr. Lambe and Mr. Newton to show that vegetarianism works wonders for old and young. It is from Mr. Newton's book, Shelley acknowledges, that he has derived the materials for his tract. Vegetarianism will prove its merits statistically and win converts. The expensive practice of growing animals to eat will cease and far more food for man be derived from the same acreage as before. The spirit of the nation in this event would then become agricultural and commerce decline, with consequent improvement to morals and manners. Nations self-sufficient in their agricultural resources would be free, and liberty-loving. We should cease also to import useless luxuries. Commerce makes for social inequality; "luxury is the fore-runner of . . . barbarism." The "use of animal flesh and fermented liquors, directly militates with this equality of the rights of man." Disease and war reduce the population which, if vegetarian, could exist in greater numbers upon the land now cultivated. Best reform diet before we seek to improve legislation. Strike to the root of the evil. The return to nature will do much but will not exempt us from hereditary disease. Our predispositions to disease are the fruit of innumerable ages. Yet they are weakened by a return to a natural diet and would in time fade. One resolving on a reformation should break sharply with his former practices. There will be a temporary loss of muscular strength but ultimate great increase. Greater ease of breathing is one effect. Ability to work after eating, another. Food loses its narcotic effect. There will be loss of irritability, ennui, and weariness. The religious impulses and conceptions of deity will be purified. Also man's enjoyment of food will be increased because of his sharpened taste. An appendix lists thirteen historical instances of longevity allegedly due to a vegetarian diet, the most notable being Old Parr, who died at the age of 152.

## The Riddle of Human Depravity

[The interest of the tract lies in Shelley's concern, in his speculations upon the mythical natural man and the unnatural man of civilization, with the problem of evil/ To one whose primary thought is for the improvement of the human lot every theory as to the entrance of evil into the world is *ipso facto* important] Shelley tried to convince himself that so simple a cause as an animal diet could be the explanation of human depravity. It wasn't wholly adequate and he had therefore to find other reasons subsequently. Yet the myth of the golden age haunted and perplexed him. There was the persistence and universality of the myth to be accounted for. The Saturnian age of Greek mythology was paralleled by the legendary Garden of Eden in the Christian mythology. There was also the contradictory evidence as to the condition of man in a state of nature. Edward Carpenter at a later time in his *Civilization; Its Cause and Cure*, debated the same theme to the conclusion that certain barbarian tribes in favored circumstances have surpassed civilized man in health, vigor, and consequent happiness. The argument is not wholly to the advantage of the moderns. Vegetarians, nudists, and others in our world would bear witness to our present doubts as to the rightness of our way of life in a highly mechanized society. Shelley pushes his argument to extreme lengths, no doubt, accepting Newton's ideas too uncritically. Such was his first reaction in encountering ideas, or people, that he liked. His second thoughts were more critical and temperate, and at times his ultimate revulsion was as great as his initial enthusiasm. Vegetarianism he apparently largely practiced to the end of his life when circumstances permitted but he ceased to regard man's adoption of an animal diet as sufficient explanation of his unhappy lot.

There is one further point of interest in the *Vindication*, its rationalization of the Prometheus myth and the Eden myth. That he was at this time reading Plutarch's essays is a coincidence which is possibly significant, for Plutarch's *Moral Essays* have much to do with the rationalization of Egyptian and Greek myth in terms of natural phenomena—sun, moon, seasons and so forth. Shelley was to pursue this practice to interesting lengths in *The Witch of Atlas* wherein the myths of Egypt and Greece are interpreted both physically and metaphysically in terms of neo-Platonism and of a modernized science. The Prometheus rationalization in the notes to *Queen Mab* and in the *Vindication* is the earliest instance I have found of this practice in his own writing.

The place of reason in Shelley's theory of the mind and the degree

in which reason enters into and determines his own beliefs are topics which must at some time be considered. Perhaps there is no better occasion than the present, prior to a discussion of his *Refutation of Deism*, a characteristic specimen of his controversial prose, kindred in spirit to the *Necessity of Atheism*, though more mature and longer than the earlier tract. Shelley was fond of argument as his works and the evidence of his friends attest. He could debate without heat any controversial topic and was that rare person, one more anxious to get at the truth of the question than to maintain his own position or upset his opponent. The formal logic of the schools attracted him and he learned its distinctions without effort. The early years, those prior to the composition of *Alastor*, his first work to display great poetic power, are years in which he is engaged in the study of political science, natural science, philosophy, and theology. The more poetical powers of imagination and intuition are in abeyance. The prose of these years is thoroughly rationalistic. His debates are carried on logically; the tribunal to which he appeals is that of reason. In the letters, which admit of more personal reflections, he sometimes declares his acceptance of beliefs incapable of rational proof—in a spirit animating the universe, or in immortality. In his poetry of this time, *Queen Mab* being chief, he similarly declares a belief in animated matter and in a spirit of nature, neither of which beliefs would be susceptible of proof. In poetry, then, and to some degree in his letters he admits imagination and emotion as justification for his beliefs: not so in his controversial prose. Hence the seeming discrepancies in his work. As an imaginative being, as a poet, he inclines to a belief in personal immortality; as a sceptical rationalist and an admirer of Hume he cannot believe much of anything.

The question then arises: What place has reason in his theory of the mind, or indeed had he in the years prior to 1814 or 1815 any definable theory of the mind? It is a question easier to raise than to answer. As a disciple of Locke, Hume, and Godwin he must, perforce, have no belief in soul or other traditional theory of the divided powers of mind. Yet he is on record as approving Lloyd's comment on Berkeley, that mind does not create, a belief which he reiterated in his *Refutation of Deism*. Mind seemingly means in this declaration no more than the mechanism which receives, classifies and compares sensations, a purely mechanical instrument which is the creation of the sensations which impinge upon it. What then does create, for to account for the created Universe there must be a creative force? In *Queen Mab* he seemingly ascribes this power to create to the will. It is

will blindly groping which has created higher forms of life from lower. In the process of advance it has in man created reason as a tool, an aid to its more rapid progress. But reason is not in itself creative but merely an agent of the power of creation inherent in the will. Thus I read the rather ambiguous and confused philosophy of *Queen Mab*. There is no evidence to this point that Shelley has pondered the neo-Platonic philosophy, in which reason is relegated to a secondary place, an earthly place, whereas the divine instrument of knowledge is held to be the intuition. Divine natures it is said in this philosophy simply apprehend truth without rationalizing it and in so far as man approaches the divine he too knows, without knowing why he knows. Despite the inconclusive evidence of *Queen Mab*, then, I should read Shelley as being an avowed rationalist up to and during the period of most of his prose, until the time, let us say, of *Alastor* and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Thereafter he is more the mystic, more the Platonist; and, whether or no avowedly, subscribes to the belief that reason is a lesser power and imagination and intuition are major powers of the mind.

In *A Refutation of Deism* it is the controversial Shelley, Shelley the keen and logical disputant, who speaks, not Shelley the poet. It is also Shelley the propagandist, for the sly purpose of the tract is by implication to confute both parties to the debate and leave the reader no recourse but to accept atheism. The title was designed to lay a snare for the unwary orthodox Christian who, reading the tract, would too late find his own faith shaken. The atheism to which the argument tends is, to be sure, more truly pantheism, but to the orthodox of Shelley's time one would be little better than the other; both, heresies equally damnable. Dialectically speaking the tract marks an immense advance on Shelley's earlier prose; its style is clear, forceful, and compact, and its argument, within the limitations set, that is to say its purely rationalistic character, is shrewd and difficult to refute.

Eusebes, the Theist, opens the dialogue by reproaching Theosophus, the Deist, for his unbelief. Theosophus, it seems, demands mathematical proofs of the truth of Christianity, whereas the merit of the Christian believer is that he has faith and does not ask proof. The proof of Christianity lies indeed in the professors of it, past and present, and in its conquest of so many men and nations. Its morality, too, is sublime. Why should a Theist question the historical authenticity of Christianity or discredit its divine revelation? Surely a revelation of the Divine is of great benefit to mankind. Considering the

state of the pagan world at the advent of the Messiah why should not God send him to regenerate man? Reason moreover is fallible. Should we not rather trust to revelation than to reason in a matter so important? Consider the dangers of not doing so. Can God have promised punishment for unbelief without meaning to keep his word? He urges Theosophus to reveal the sophisms which delude him and Theosophus readily complies.

At the outset Theosophus advances an argument which we have several times previously encountered in Shelley's letters and in the *Necessity of Atheism*: that no one should be condemned for unbelief. A man believes only as he can, as his reason is persuaded. It is impossible for him to believe that of which he is unconvinced. Eusebes, moreover, appeals to reason as an arbiter of that which, he has declared, can be accepted not on grounds of reason but of faith. Theosophus then outlines the major tenets of Christian belief. The Christian believes in Christ, the son of God sent to reform the world, and in the Bible which purports to be an authentic account of the Divine purpose. This purpose must be to secure the happiness of God's creatures. The omnipotent God designed the world to this end with full foresight. But God also created Satan, and upon the rebellion of Satan cast him into hell, yet permitted him to tempt man with the forbidden fruit. Man fell as God in his omniscience knew he would do. Whereupon the author of all good condemned his creatures to hell. All primitive peoples worship gods cast in their own savage likeness. The God of the Christians is no better than those other gods, a cruel, obscene, and unjust God as the Bible attests. "The God of the Jews is not the benevolent author of this beautiful world."

To the eye of reason, says Theosophus, the Christian Deity appears no more omnipotent and immutable than benevolent. Why should millions be damned for Adam's fall or saved by the crucifixion of an innocent man? Omniscience would have foreseen and prevented such barbarities and foreseen the inefficacy of Christianity itself, which in the period 328 to 1453 did little to enlighten a world which was the theatre of "ceaseless and sanguinary wars." Christ came indeed not to bring peace but a sword. If these crimes spring not from Christianity but from its abuse they were nevertheless preventable by an omnipotent Deity. Christianity can only be judged by its fruit, the cruelties practiced in its name. Nor is the Christian morality admirable, fostering as it does abjectness and credulity; and, apathetic to love and friendship, extolling asceticism. Its best moral precepts it borrowed from the Orient. But these count for little in a religion



which stresses the obligation of blind faith, forgetful that belief is not voluntary but dependent on the apprehension of truth. "The system which assumes a false criterion of moral virtue, must be as pernicious as it is absurd." As for miracles, they are both impossible to credit and an insult to the Deity supposedly responsible for them. Nor were the Gospel accounts of them written by eye-witnesses, as the discrepancies bear witness. Clearly, if the Almighty has spoken in these events, the Universe has not been convinced. Let Eusebes logically refute these arguments.

Eusebes, apprehending the difficulty of converting Theosophus by the methods of reason, remarks that he was not privy to the Almighty's designs. To the limited vision there does seem ground to criticize nature and the world for its discomforts and cruelties. Yet despite the difficulty, Eusebes will endeavor to prove the fallacies of Deism provided Theosophus will promise to accept Christianity or Atheism as the sole alternatives. To this Theosophus agrees, denouncing atheism in horrified terms. "The Atheist," he asserts, "is a monster among men. . . . This dark and terrible doctrine was surely the abortion of some blind speculator's brain: some strange and hideous perversion of intellect, some portentous distortion of reason." Who can look upon this harmonious world and deny the existence of a designer nor feel gratitude and adoration for him? If reason conducts to Atheism, Theosophus will reject reason. Eusebes then demands that Theosophus state explicitly the grounds for his belief in the existence of a God and Theosophus outlines the familiar argument from design, not excluding the watch and Paley's deductions therefrom. He concludes: "If there is motion in the Universe, there is a God. The power of beginning motion is no less an attribute of mind than sensation or thought. Wherever motion exists it is evident that mind has operated. The phenomena of the Universe indicate the agency of powers which cannot belong to inert matter."

Theosophus thus cunningly employing those arguments by which Theism has sought to rationalize its beliefs is astounded by the answer which he provokes. Eusebes, who had professed only faith, not reason, as his guide, falls upon the argument from design, and destroys it with cool logic. Design, he says, must be proved before we can suppose a designer. Design in a machine of human contrivance we know because of our experience with similar machines and those who designed them but were we without such knowledge and found a watch on the ground we should conclude only "that it was a thing of Nature." Consider, also, the fitness of the Universe to the accomplish-

ment of its ends. If it had a creator must he not be more perfect than his product, and back of him another creator more perfect and so endlessly? "Until it is clearly proved that the Universe was created, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity." We must believe the less incomprehensible of the alternatives. All we know in the universe is the effects of causes adequate to these effects operating according to laws inherent in the scheme of things. The nature of these laws is incomprehensible but there is no need to drag in a Deity to make them more so. The laws suffice to explain the observed effects. Their operations, when we have sufficient data to invoke them, are predictable and infallible. The action of matter is inherent in matter, for inert matter, matter without qualities is merely an abstraction. "Matter, such as we behold it is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtile. Light, electricity and magnetism are fluids not surpassed by thought itself in tenuity and activity: like thought they are sometimes the cause and sometimes the effect of motion; and, distinct as they are from every other class of substances, with which we are acquainted, seem to possess equal claims with thought to the unmeaning distinction of immateriality."

The essential argument in the foregoing, that the universe is sufficient to itself and self-explanatory without recourse to metaphysical ultimates, derives from Holbach. But upon this is grafted a different doctrine evident in the excerpt quoted, that of the immateriality of matter and of the resemblance of the forces of electricity, magnetism, and light to the tenuity of thought itself. Various origins may be ascribed to this, either Platonic and mystical or scientific, for Erasmus Darwin and Humphry Davy, as before them Newton, had played with the notion that matter was no more than force, force in a state of relative inaction and seeming rest. The argument of Eusebes reduces the Universe to a self-existent monism, a fund of force which operates according to its own laws and which manifests itself as much in matter and thought as in electrical phenomena. It is a necessitarian universe with inviolable laws, but "material" and "immaterial" are no longer intelligible terms, their distinction is unmeaning.

Eusebes then proceeds to a consideration of man in nature, differing according to environment (Montesquieu). He is adapted to the circumstances in which he lives and inevitably subject to their laws. It is only our ignorance which prevents our explaining him in terms of his own being and the forces which play upon him. To import into the scheme of things an immaterial creator of them is superfluous. (Be it observed that Eusebes had previously declared the term "imma-

terial" meaningless as distinguished from "material.") What then of order and disorder? They are "no more than modifications of our own perceptions of the relations which subsist between ourselves and external objects." A malignant power back of them is fully as reasonable an assumption as a benevolent. Order and disorder are wholly relative to our perceptions. An earthquake is injurious to a city destroyed by it but beneficial to the commercial rival of that city. "Famine is good to the corn-merchant, evil to the poor, and indifferent to those whose fortunes can at all times command a superfluity." Credulity, and consequent worship of gods and God, "is gross in proportion to the ignorance of the mind which it enslaves." All the attributes of God are "borrowed from the passions and powers of the human mind" or are negations of them. The word God differs in its meaning with every race and time. Nor is it a universal belief, for "men of powerful intellect and spotless virtue have in every age protested" against it. To postulate a God is unnecessary, for power, the assumed attribute of Deity, is an attribute of substance itself. Nor is it necessary to postulate an intelligent Deity, for intelligence is known to us only as a mode of animal being. "The God of the rational Theosophist is a vast and wise animal." Theosophus had "laid it down as a maxim that the power of beginning motion is an attribute of mind as much as thought and sensation." To this Eusebes replies: "Mind cannot create, it can only perceive. Mind is the recipient of impressions made on the organs of sense, and without the action of external objects we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind, but totally incapable of the knowledge of anything. It is evident therefore that the mind deserves to be considered as the effect, rather than the cause of motion." Having thus by the methods of reason demonstrated the fallacies of Deism, Eusebes presents to the perturbed Theosophus the choice between Christianity and Atheism. Theosophus makes this reply: "I am willing to promise that if, after mature deliberation, the arguments which you have advanced in favour of Atheism should appear incontrovertible, I will endeavour to adopt so much of the Christian scheme as is consistent with my persuasion of the goodness, unity and majesty of God."

The unfortunate Theosophus is in a cleft stick and the unwary reader is presumably in no better situation. If he clings to reason there is nothing for it but Atheism. Yet the Atheism is of a peculiar character. The argument has destroyed a Creator existing outside of his creation. The word creation itself has, in relation to the Universe as

a whole, no relevance. The universe, it is assumed, may always have existed. Nor is it a cold and mechanical collection of inert material forms operating in certain habitual ways, which are known as laws. Shelley conceives that it may be all alive to the minutest particle, may be nothing but an expression of force in its various manifestations—electricity, magnetism, light, and thought. This is something quite different from the material universe as conceived by Holbach. It is an animate universe. Whether its diverse animate forms may be summed in one larger consciousness, such as the Spirit of Nature in *Queen Mab*, Shelley does not here commit himself. It cannot, on the evidence of this one philosophic dialogue, be said that he is a Pantheist, for Pantheism implies a spirit which sums up or contains the animated parts. That unity he does not postulate. But it is not a material universe. It is an animated immaterial universe and Shelley may thus be defined as an Animist. That he called himself an Atheist means merely that he was a rebel and a heretic to revealed religion. The trend of his subsequent thinking is moreover indicated. He is to develop this immaterial philosophy. That he has abandoned a belief in Necessity is not yet clear. If he has realized the incompatibility of a Necessitarian universe, however immaterial, with the attainment of perfection through man's agency, the evidence of this altered belief does not appear. It must be looked for later.

The dates of the composition of Shelley's fragmentary prose essays which are of interest in tracing the development of his thought are for the most part uncertain but usually ascribed to the year 1815 or later. Their exact chronology, though to ascertain it would be useful, is not vital. It is not probable that the renunciation of a belief long held and the adoption of another occurred dramatically at a specific moment. In the stream of thought it is more likely that one group of beliefs borne on the crest of the wave gradually lost momentum and drifted into backwaters and eddies while others usurped the place formerly theirs. It is more important to determine the direction of the stream than to determine the precise nature of its cargo—which is sure to be miscellaneous—at any particular moment. The trend of Shelley's mental evolution is, I think, sufficiently clear, and we may therefore turn to the letters and events of the year 1814 to examine what evidence they may offer, corroborative or otherwise, of inferences thus far drawn.

The year 1814 was an important one in Shelley's life, for it was then that he separated from Harriet and eloped with Mary Godwin. It was a year of emotional turmoil and distraction. His financial affairs

were in a bad way and the difficulties with his father concerning them not yet composed. It is hardly to be wondered at that he produced little, unless some of his fragmentary prose was then composed. Nevertheless there is evidence of the rapid maturing of his poetic and philosophic powers. The few poems he composed mark a great advance on earlier work and disclose the lyric gift which is to many readers his greatest claim to poetical interest. It was a year, too, in which the acquaintance with Peacock ripened and through Peacock he began greatly to advance his study of Greek. That Peacock otherwise much influenced him is, I think, improbable. Shelley had remarked in a letter to Hogg, November 26, 1813: "A new acquaintance is on a visit with us this winter. He is a very mild, agreeable man, and a good scholar. His enthusiasm is not very ardent, nor his views very comprehensive: but he is neither superstitious, ill-tempered, dogmatical, or proud." He held much the same opinion at a later time after four intervening years of friendship.

A letter to Hogg of March 16, 1814, intimates the impending domestic troubles which were to involve Shelley and conveys the extreme depression of his spirits. He writes from Mrs. Boinville's home at Bracknell where he has found a temporary respite "from the dismaying solitude of myself" and laments the early necessity of leaving the "delightful tranquillity of this happy home—for it has become my home." Hogg, he remarks, is happier than he: "I have sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion, which renders me dead to everything, but the unenviable capacity of indulging the vanity of hope, and a terrible susceptibility to objects of disgust and hatred." He adds, "I am much changed from what I was. I look with regret to our happy evenings at Oxford, and with wonder at the hopes which in the excess of my madness I there encouraged." That his unhappiness is in part domestic is revealed in his bitter remarks upon Eliza, Harriet's elder sister: "Eliza is still with us—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. . . . I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. . . . I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch." Yet however down he might be Shelley never ceased to be an intellectual being: "I have begun to learn Italian again. I am reading Beccaria, 'Dei delitti e pene'. . . . Cornelia assists me in this language." He has forced himself to read also "Dumont's 'Bentham.'" He transcribes a stanza which suggests that he is in love with Cornelia, that she—or someone—disturbs the rest "that was the portion of despair." The lines have a little of the poign-

ant beauty which characterizes Shelley's lyric poetry of subsequent years.

The breach with Eliza became an open one. She departed and shortly Harriet went to be with her, though there is no suggestion that she intended a separation. It was a fatal step, prompted perhaps by Eliza's malignant spirit. It was Eliza, too, who prompted Harriet to expenditures which Shelley could not afford. So it was that Shelley when he returned alone to London began to dine daily with the Godwins where he and Mary fell desperately in love. Of Shelley's feeling towards Harriet, friendliness is perhaps the best description. She had ceased to be a companion to him and no longer cared to educate herself in those pursuits which meant most to him, giving up books for bonnets. He had, of course, been mistaken in ever thinking he could educate her to near his level. Mary Godwin, as will appear, later failed him somewhat and in similar fashion. Peacock's account of Shelley's distraction and despair, torn between his legal obligation to Harriet and his desperate passion for Mary, quotes Shelley as saying, "Everyone who knows me must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal but she can do neither." Therein Shelley expresses the essence of the situation with his customary exactness.

Shelley eloped with Mary Godwin on July 28, 1814. Jane (Clare) Clairmont accompanied them to France where they endured various vicissitudes due to lack of money. A journal of the tour, which covered parts of France and Switzerland and a return journey down the Rhine, Mary Shelley published in 1817 under the title *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*. There is in it little of importance to the record of Shelley's intellectual and poetic development. The country laid waste by the Napoleonic wars and the wretchedness and brutality of the people in the devastated regions struck him forcibly; he writes of them in a letter to Harriet of August 13. The magnificence of the Alps and the beauty of the Rhine must have had their great influence on him also though of this there is no direct record. Rivers had always their magical appeal to him and became later his symbol for mortal existence. The scenery of *Alastor* is blent of his Rhine journey and the descriptions he so admired in Miss Owenson's *The Missionary*.

Shelley returned to England penniless, for Harriet had withdrawn all the money lodged at his bankers as he guilelessly had permitted her to do. He was obliged to sue to her for immediate funds. Godwin refused to see his disciple who, in parting from Harriet and eloping

with Mary, had but followed Godwin's own philosophy. Shelley, seeking desperately to raise money on his expectations, was for some weeks in daily danger of arrest and imprisonment for debt. Nor were his circumstances bettered by the importunities of Godwin for financial aid, for Godwin while publicly repudiating his daughter's lover was not above taking money from him. It would be an exaggeration to say that henceforth Shelley had nothing to learn of human selfishness and coldness, for the Hoppners and Byron added a few refining touches. But for these he was, in a sense, prepared. Godwin he had revered and Godwin was also Mary's father. The calculated harshness and thick-skinned cupidity of the old Perfectibilian staggered Shelley. It staggered his own daughter. Shelley writes to her, October 24, 1814: "My imagination is confounded by the uniform prospect of the perfidity, wickedness, and hardheartedness of mankind. Mary most amply redeems their blackest crimes. But I confess to you that I have been shocked and staggered by Godwin's cold injustice. The places where I have seen that man's fine countenance bring bitterness home to my heart to think of his cutting cruelty. . . . I have at moments almost felt despair to think how cold and worldly Godwin has become." Mary, October 28, writes: "I detest Mrs. Godwin; she plagues my father out of his life. . . . Why will Godwin not follow the obvious bent of his affections, and be reconciled to us? No; his prejudices, the world, and *she*—do you not hate her my love?—all these forbid it."

The rapacities of lawyers and creditors did not greatly surprise Shelley. He had early believed the world composed largely of self-seekers, stupid people who were unhappy but whom sweet reason should convert to a better way of life. They were largely the victims of circumstances, the evil institutions of society. Alter the institutions and these selfish folk would reveal their latent potentialities for good. But there were, he believed, a considerable number of disinterested and benevolent minds guided by something better than self-interest. He had trusted Hogg, and Elizabeth Hitchener, and Godwin. Each in his own way had betrayed him. Harriet in her turn had disappointed, if not betrayed, him. Peacock was cold and worldly-wise. He could be trusted, Shelley believed, only so far as his self-interest was not endangered. It is a mistake to judge Shelley a fool in his misunderstanding of human nature. He read character well enough. But in his youth his generous nature misled him in a few instances to believe those whose professed sentiments he highly approved to be themselves as good as their word. The emotional conse-

quences to him of his disillusionments, and the effect, therefore, upon his work, can, I think, scarcely be exaggerated. To altruistic natures the betrayal of friendship is the one treachery to which they are defenseless. They are armored against the world in general. The world is their enemy to fight, or their patient to heal. They are prepared for misunderstanding, cruelty, and martyrdom at the hands of the many. But they must believe that there are a few others like themselves, as disinterested and generous as they. Otherwise they are intolerably alone and lose faith in their own ideals, in their sanity even. No doubt it is a wholesome experience for strong natures. Withstanding this greatest of disillusionments they can endure anything. They become wholly self-reliant as Shelley became insofar as a naturally loving and trusting nature permitted. They turn inward and feed upon their own strength of soul. Outwardly they may cease to participate in the affairs of a world beyond their power of saving. Shelley henceforth, though always a rebel, ceases to be an active reformer and becomes poet and philosopher. The evil in the world lay deeper than he had thought, its explanation not to be found in the superficial philosophy of Locke, or Rousseau, or Godwin. He must go far beyond, to the new science of which they knew nothing and to the "kings of old philosophy."/)



## CHAPTER VIII

### *Prose Essays: The Problem of Evil*



SHELLEY's money affairs took a turn for the better when, upon the death of old Sir Bysshe, January 6, 1815, Sir Timothy Shelley finally came to an agreement with his son whereby the latter for the surrender of certain legal rights received a yearly income of £1000 and a sum of money with which he paid his own and Godwin's debts. Despite the many claims upon him, including an allowance to Harriet, this was sufficient for his needs. His only extravagances were books and charities. He knew henceforth security and a domestic peace such as he had not known before. There were tragic episodes in the deaths of children and the legal loss of his children by Harriet; Clare Clairmont was for a time a disturbing influence; there was Fanny Imlay's suicide, and later Harriet's; there was the birth of Clare's child, whose father was Byron, and Shelley's efforts to befriend the unmarried mother. It does not read like the record of a tranquil life, nor was it. But he was sufficiently at peace, with sufficient leisure to read his books, and think, and write. The writing was not at first extensive. He no longer dashed things off in haste and hurried with them to the printer. They were thoughtfully considered and carefully done, with but few exceptions. For the most part they are literature. Whether the miscellany of prose known as the *Essays* is truly the product of this period 1814-1815 is, I think, very unsure. Not until after Shelley's death was it published by Mrs. Shelley from the manuscripts in her possession. It is a fragmentary collection of jottings, notes, and parts of chapters for works much more extensive than he ever completed. In it are many ideas important to an understanding of Shelley's intellectual history. Their date cannot be precisely determined but it suffices to assume that they are of the period 1813-1817, some, it may very well be, of even an earlier origin than 1813. I shall take up the essays ascribed by Rossetti and Forman to the years 1814-1815 in the order in which Forman prints them in his edition of Shelley's prose.

*The Assassins*, one of Shelley's several abortive attempts at a novel, was begun in August of 1814 when he and Mary were on their first tour of the Continent. Four short chapters of this narrative survive, probably all that were ever composed. Very little happens in these

chapters nor is any theme suggested which shows promise of development. Shelley had little more than a locality: an Arcadian valley peopled by a tribe who had returned to a virtuous life close to nature. What to do with these citizens of the future Shelley, I suspect, didn't clearly see. Mr. H. G. Wells is the only writer known who can make the activities of man in a Utopian state interesting to our sinful nature. Shelley's earthly Paradises are usually lost in an incandescent haze of perfection and but for the scientific and artistic outlets suggested in *Prometheus* our interest would cease with the overthrow of Jupiter. As it is we admire the last act of the drama for other qualities than its Utopian scene.

The story has to do with a small sect of Christians, resembling in their opinions the Gnostics, who upon the approach of the Romans to besiege Jerusalem flee to a hidden valley in the mountains of Lebanon. The members of this sect "esteemed the human understanding to be the paramount rule of human conduct; they maintained that the obscurest religious truth required for its complete elucidation no more than the strenuous application of the energies of mind. It appeared impossible to them that any doctrine could be subversive of social happiness which is not capable of being confuted by arguments derived from the nature of existing things. With the devoutest submission to the law of Christ, they united an intrepid spirit of inquiry as to the correctest mode of acting in particular instances of conduct that occur among men." This sect, hitherto too unimportant to arouse persecution, fled only in time to escape destruction. "Attached from principle to peace, despising and hating the pleasures and the customs of the degenerate mass of mankind, this unostentatious community of good and happy men fled to the solitudes of Lebanon." There, living simply, "no longer would the poison of a diseased civilization embroil their very nutriment with pestilence. . . . Love, friendship, and philanthropy, would now be the characteristic disposers of their industry."

The reference to the Gnostic sect in these citations is of peculiar interest in that Shelley in *Prometheus* expounds ideas in some respects similar to those held by the Gnostics. There is also in *The Assassins* the introduction of the snake as a playmate of the children, a creature to be loved and cherished as similarly the snake, personifying the spirit of freedom, is cherished in the allegorical prologue to the *Revolt of Islam*.

The significance of the snake in Shelley's symbolism links his thought closely with that of the Gnostics, for in the philosophy of this

sect the God of man's creation is an evil being who denies man knowledge. Sophia, minister of the Ultimate, tempts man to knowledge by means of her familiar, the snake. Through knowledge and reason man frees himself from the evil domination of the God of his creation. The snake, therefore, is the symbol of reason which frees man from superstition and tyranny.) The resemblance of this symbolism to that employed in the *Revolt of Islam* is close and Shelley's allusion in *The Assassins* to the Gnostics and his employment of the snake suggest that he was already acquainted with the Gnostic philosophy. Its interest for him lay apparently in the importance which it attaches to reason rather than blind faith while at the same time its adherents accepted the doctrines of tolerance and benevolence taught by the Messiah. They were *rational* Christians.

The Gnostic allusion in *The Assassins* is its chief interest in the record of Shelley's thought. There are, however, a number of poetic descriptions of nature in which he records the effects of natural beauty and sublimity upon the inhabitants of the happy valley. "A new and sacred fire was kindled in their hearts and sparkled in their eyes. Every gesture, every feature, the minutest action, was modelled to beneficence and beauty by the holy inspiration that had descended on their searching spirits.... Their religious tenets had also undergone a change.... The gratitude which they owed to the benignant Spirit by which their limited intelligences had not only been created but redeemed... became less the topic of comment or contemplation; not, therefore, did it cease to be their presiding guardian, the guide of their inmost thoughts, the tribunal of appeal for the minutest particulars of their conduct.... Already had their eternal peace commenced. The darkness had passed away from the open gates of death.... Each devoted his powers to the happiness of the other.... They clearly acknowledged, in every case, that conduct to be entitled to preference which would obviously produce the greatest pleasure." These perfect beings at one with Nature and the creative Spirit which animates Nature could think of men differently circumstanced only as "shapes of some unholy vision, moulded by the spirit of Evil, which the sword of the merciful destroyer should sweep from this beautiful world." Whether Shelley in thus blending his Gnostic sect and the legendary Assassins is merely attempting an explanation of the peculiar practices of the latter or whether he is justifying the philosophy of tyrannicide does not explicitly appear. He can hardly at one stage in the development of his radical philosophy have been averse from the latter; I am not aware that he ever openly

avowed a belief in it. Later, having accepted the ethics of Christ, he believed in overcoming evil by good, by long-suffering and forgiveness. The picture nevertheless which he gives in *The Assassins* of these happy beings, at one with Nature and Nature's God, becoming indeed seemingly identified with God while yet on earth, is a conception very similar in descriptive terms and in its philosophy also to the picture of the Promethean Age in *Prometheus Unbound*.

[The fragment, *On the Punishment of Death*, assigned by Rossetti to 1815 expresses views common to the penal reformers of the Revolutionary era, Beccaria and others. Punishment should aim at the improvement of the criminal rather than gratify the lust for vengeance. As to the punishment of death, Shelley in its consideration speculates on the probability of survival, in which he seems to believe, and the influence of our actions in this life upon our condition in the future state. In inflicting death we plunge the individual into the unknown, whether to reward or punishment deriving from his earthly life. But as a measure of punishment for the criminal or as a warning to others, "it is singularly inadequate. . . . The death of what is called a traitor, that is, a person who, from whatever motive, would abolish the government of the day, is as often a triumphant exhibition of suffering virtue, as the warning of a culprit." Criminals of a low type, on the other hand, are often little sensible to fear and pain. Their execution is an inadequate deterrent to others of like inclinations. The effect of the death penalty is chiefly to gratify the lust for revenge which is felt by those other than the criminally inclined and to whom the criminal is an enemy to security. "It excites those emotions which it is the chief object of civilization to extinguish for ever." Punishment as revenge "confirms all the inhuman and unsocial impulses of men. It is almost a proverbial remark, that those nations in which the penal code has been particularly mild, have been distinguished from all others by the rarity of crime. . . . A more decisive argument is afforded by a consideration of the universal connexion of ferocity of manners, and a contempt of social ties, with the contempt of human life. Governments which derive their institutions from the existence of circumstances of barbarism and violence, with some rare exceptions perhaps, are bloody in proportion as they are despotic, and form the manners of their subjects to a sympathy with their own spirit." It is a generalization as fully exemplified in the world of our day as in Shelley's. ♪

The humanity of Shelley's philosophy of punishment affords no surprise. It is the incidental comments upon immortality that I find

most interesting, for on this question, as has been seen, Shelley expresses in his prose and verse a variety of opinions. In this instance, calling no intuitions to his support, Shelley contends, on the basis of reason, that a future life is probable. It "has been the almost universal opinion of mankind." The popular objections to the belief, "derived from what is called the atomic system, are proved to be applicable only to the relation which one object bears to another, as apprehended by the mind, and not to existence itself, or the nature of that essence which is the medium and receptacle of objects." He considers it probable also that "the discipline and order of [our] internal thoughts" may affect our condition in a future state. He premises "operations in the order of the whole of nature, tending . . . to some definite mighty end." To this "the agencies of our peculiar nature are subordinate; nor is there any reason to suppose, that in a future state they should become suddenly exempt from that subordination." What he seems to say is that the universe is a moral order consistent throughout and that it is plausible to assume that our life on earth influences our future state and that preëxistence influences our life here. These speculations, he says, are tentative and the philosopher does not presume to decide upon them; but the tone of his discussion is such as to suggest that the hypothesis, if it is no more, appeals to him. As an indication of his growing Platonism the passage has, therefore, significance.

The fragment, *On Life*, is also assigned by Rossetti to 1815. Brief as it is, it is immensely significant of Shelley's thought both as poet and philosopher, if indeed these capacities in him are to be separately distinguished. In it we catch an illuminating glimpse of his mental history and his development from materialism to idealism or mysticism.

"Life," he observes with no great originality, "... is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being. . . . Life, the great miracle, we admire not, because it is so miraculous." Did we not become familiar with it, it "would otherwise absorb and overawe the functions of that which is its object." His thought paraphrases Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations*. We become habituated to the wonder of existence. "What is life? Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will, and we employ words to express them. . . . How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being! . . . For what are we? Whence do we come? and whither do we go? Is birth the commencement, is death the conclusion of our being? What is birth and death?" It is the function of

the "most refined abstractions of logic" to restore to us the wonder of our existence which we lose in our familiarity with it. "It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from the scheme of things. I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived." He goes on to speak of "the shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals" which "had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking." He became discontented, he says, with this system, for he felt within him "a spirit . . . at enmity with nothingness and dissolution." He thus became a convert to the "intellectual system."

The clearest statement of the intellectual system he has found, he says, in Sir William Drummond's *Academical Questions*. It does not establish any new truth or give "additional insight into our hidden nature." Its merit is that "it destroys error, and the roots of error. . . . It reduces the mind to that freedom in which it would have acted, but for the misuse of words and signs, the instruments of its own creation." He employs the word "signs" broadly, including "all familiar objects . . . standing, not for themselves, but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought which shall lead to a train of thoughts. Our whole life is thus an education of error." He goes on to say that children and adults, when lost in reverie, do not distinguish between themselves and their surroundings. They "feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction." These states, he remarks, are associated with "an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life." The intellectual philosophy teaches the unity of life. "Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought, which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects." The existence of individual minds, he declares, is likewise a delusion. "The words, *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind." This does not mean that I, who write and think, am that mind, but only a portion of it. "The relations of *things* remain unchanged, by whatever system. By the word *things* is to be understood any object of thought, that is, any thought upon which any other thought is employed, with an appre-

hension of distinction. The relations of these remain unchanged; and such is the material of our knowledge." He then concludes, in an argument which I find difficult to follow, "Mind...cannot create, it can only perceive....It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind, that is, of existence, is similar to mind."

Creation, we have previously seen, Shelley ascribes to will and imagination, not to thought. But what then does he mean by "mind" which is not creative? Much of the difficulty in grasping his philosophy appears to hang on this definition of mind. I can only suppose that he means by it "understanding" as distinguished from "reason" in the Kantian sense. Shelley seems to be clinging to the conception of mind as a mechanical instrument which receives sensations from the world without and records, classifies, and compares them. It is dependent upon what it receives, is essentially a passive instrument and so does not create. The universe of thoughts, in which no distinction is to be drawn between external and internal, between what we usually characterize as "things," and sensations and thoughts deriving from things, is created by will and imagination, whether in God or in man. There is to me an obscurity here in the word "thought," as previously in the word "mind," for Shelley seems to say that the world—external and internal—consists of thoughts but that these are created by something wholly dissimilar to thought. Again perhaps the difficulty lies in a word. What does Shelley mean by "created"? externalized? Does thought become tangible, take on visible form, only through an act of the imagination and the will?

I am puzzled also by the statement that "nothing exists but as it is perceived." This no doubt is true for the individual. For him it exists only as perceived. But must it not have an existence in a larger mind, that of God? To resolve externals and internals both to thought, to disclaim materialism wholly, even to identify the individual with the mind of the universe, as being a "portion" of it, seems to me not to do away with the difficulty. Waiving the question whether the phenomenal world is wholly thought, wholly immaterial, and the source and percipient of sensation similar or identical one with the other, the universe of which the percipient mind is a part must have an existence over and beyond what that mind at any moment perceives. This would seem to be what Shelley really means. The mind of the percipient does not create the thought constituting the universe but increasingly recognizes what already is existent there. If this is what he means his conception is Berkeleyan essentially, though I am not aware that Berkeley ascribes to will or imagination, rather than

to thought, the power to create. I indeed find it impossible to dissociate imagination from thought unless thought is very narrowly defined as thought cast in the form of words. In *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley says that Prometheus "gave man speech and speech created thought," an idea which would seem to imply some such narrow definition.

What is the certain residue of Shelley's fragmentary essay and the comment thereon? Several beliefs which we must bear in mind as we pursue Shelley's philosophy to its greater refinements: (1) There is no distinction between "material" and "immaterial." Both "objects" and "thoughts" are equally immaterial. Both are thought. (2) The individual mind is part of the larger mind. It is a thought which is a part of a more comprehensive thought. (3) Mind does not create. Mind in this sense means, presumably, "understanding" in the Kantian definition. It is a passive instrument which responds mechanically to sensations. That which creates Shelley has elsewhere defined as will and imagination. (4) "Nothing exists but as it is perceived," a statement which seems to me true only in a restricted sense. To the percipient, things (thoughts) exist only as perceived. But have they not existence in the all-embracing mind before being perceived by the "partial" mind?

The brief essay *On Love* is ascribed by Rossetti to 1815 and by Forman to that year or "even earlier." If indeed earlier, which is doubtful, the interest of the essay would lie chiefly in the unmistakable evidence of Platonic influence. Vestiges of that influence we have already encountered but little that is explicit except in the letters. If, as has been inferred, Shelley's development as a thinker is away from rationalism and towards Platonism, any work which dates the stages of that development is important. We can say of the essay *On Love* only that if it is early it reveals an aspect of Shelley's thought quite other than the materialism and necessitarianism of his first manner. It is not in itself of a style which commends itself to the Shelley admirer, being consciously eloquent, a kind of prose poem, something better done in verse. But it is revealing of the inner sensitive nature of Shelley, the nature for which he "wrought linkèd armor" against the darts of life. He says, "I know not the internal constitution of other men" though "in some external attributes they resemble me." And often, thinking "to appeal to something in common, and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land.... With a spirit ill fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and



feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought sympathy, and have found only repulse and disappointment."

What is Love? "It is that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves." Love it appears is a kind of sympathy and understanding, a sense of oneness. "This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness." He goes on to add, "We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed; a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our own soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise, which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it." It is the unappeasable desire to find someone who can understand and enter into this essential being that "is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends." To attain this "it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules." So it is that when we do not find sympathy in the human beings around us "we love the flowers, the grass, the waters, and the sky." There are an eloquence and a melody in nature "which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone?"

It is a passage which reveals much in Shelley's life and in his poetry. The sympathy and understanding which he desired and too rarely found in mankind met a better response in the phenomena of nature. The spiritual affinity whom he sought was not to be known among earthly women, for she was no less than the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty desired by that soul within a soul which he describes as the perfect miniature of the imperfect being which is its shadow. The whole thought is clearly Platonistic in its description of the imper-

fect soul desiring its complement, and its thirst for the divine beauty from which it is separated, for its native home, of which beautiful things in this world are intimations and reminders. The soul as he describes it, a soul within a soul, is best explained in the terms of neo-Platonism by which to man are ascribed three souls or vehicles of the soul, the animal and the emotional which perish with the body, and the mental soul which is the enduring divinity within us, "the mirror" as he describes it, which "reflects only the forms of purity and brightness."

This mystical doctrine of Platonic and neo-Platonic origin reads strangely when compared with his strongly rationalistic arguments on such themes as *On a Future State*, the subject of the next among the prose works to be considered. There are, intellectually, at this stage of his development, *circa* 1815, two Shelleys, Shelley the rationalist and sceptic and Shelley the Platonist and mystic. These two intellectually diverse natures have yet to be integrated and reconciled.

Mrs. Shelley, in her comment upon the fragment *On a Future State*, remarks that "in this portion of his Essay he gives us only that view of a future state which is to be derived from reasoning and analogy"; that it is "not to be supposed" he "should be content with a mere logical view of that which even in religion is a mystery and a wonder"; for he "certainly regarded the country beyond the grave as one by no means foreign to our interests and hopes." Her perplexity is evident, for the views of the essay are clearly disharmonious with Shelley's mature speculations. That Mrs. Shelley moreover is unable to date the fragment suggests strongly that it was composed before her intimate knowledge of Shelley in the early summer of 1814. Also, the style, the strict rationalism of the approach, and the evident pleasure taken in the analysis of logical fallacies recall the manner of *The Necessity of Atheism*. At a later time he could scarcely avoid considerations which in this essay he refuses to admit. Other internal evidences, to be pointed out, strengthen the belief that the fragment was composed when he was an avowed materialist. To consider it then at this point, when views contradictory to it have already been examined, is merely to conform to the order of its position in the standard edition of Shelley's prose. Future editors of Shelley will, I doubt not, place it among his earliest compositions, on the score of its internal evidence if no further evidence of an external character is unearthed.

The essay begins with the statement: "It has been the persuasion

of an immense majority of human beings in all ages and nations that we continue to live after death." It has not sufficed, for popular belief, to accept the speculations of philosophers that upon death the animal is merely resolved into its constituent elements without loss of energy. Spirit and matter, it has been believed, are not so "susceptible of division and decay"; the animating principle must survive unchanged. Those philosophers to whom we owe the most for scientific advance hold a contrary view, "that intelligence is the mere result of certain combinations among the particles of its objects." Philosophers of this belief can believe in survival only upon the "interposition of a supernatural power." In the logical examination of the problem the questions both of "the existence of a God, and a future state of rewards and punishments, are totally foreign to the subject.... It is not an inconsistency to suppose at the same time, that the animating power survives the body which it has animated, by laws as independent of any supernatural agent as those through which it first became united with it." The natural philosopher impartially judging the evidence presented by death, "believes that he sees with more certainty that it is attended with the annihilation of sentiment and thought." For he observes the great effects, upon the mental powers, of sleep, disease, and age. Thought seems to be dependent wholly on the physical organs.

"It is probable," says Shelley, "that what we call thought is not an actual being, but no more than the relation between certain parts of that infinitely varied mass, of which the rest of the universe is composed, and which ceases to exist so soon as those parts change their position with regard to each other." If thought is, however, a distinct substance why should it be assumed "to be something essentially distinct from all others, and exempt from subjection to those laws from which no other substance is exempt"? Thought differs "from all other substances, as electricity, and light, and magnetism . . . differ from all others. . . . Yet the difference between light and earth is scarcely greater than that which exists between life, or thought, and fire." As the difference between the two former is no argument for the permanence of either, why then of the latter two? For life to exist without consciousness, memory, or desire would be a negation in terms. Or to say that life may persist after death in distribution among various forms is again to beg the question. Indeed, "all that we see or know perishes and is changed." It is only our desire which leads us to believe that thought and consciousness persist. It is difficult to believe that we existed before birth; analogously it is difficult to be-

lieve we survive death. "This desire to be for ever as we are; the reluctance to a violent and unexperienced change, which is common to all the animated and inanimate combinations of the universe, is, indeed, the secret persuasion which has given birth to the opinions of a future state." The argument throughout, though judicial in tone, is, it will be observed, essentially scientific rather than philosophic in character. Its assumptions are materialistic; thought is tacitly no more than a manifestation of matter, a secretion of the brain in the words of Cabanis, the physiological psychologist whom Shelley cites in the notes to *Queen Mab*.

The *Speculations on Metaphysics* is assigned by Mrs. Shelley to 1815. The date is probably accurate, for she tells an episode of the work's composition, Shelley's agitation when he recalled a dream. The fragments are scarcely more than notes for five chapters of a work whose proposed scope and length can scarcely be guessed. Its interest, as is that of most of the prose fragments under discussion, is in its suggestion of a phase of Shelley's mental development. He appears to be in a transitional stage from his earlier materialistic determinism to the freer philosophy of Plato and the neo-Platonists. Locke is mentioned but Shelley is more concerned with ideas suggesting Hartley and Berkeley. He is no longer satisfied with the explanation of experience as the mechanistic reaction to sensation. The mind itself is the field of his exploration and the method that of introspective analysis.

He begins: "It is an axiom in mental philosophy, that we can think of nothing which we have not perceived. . . . We can imagine nothing, we can reason of nothing, we can remember nothing, we can foresee nothing." This, of course, is pure Locke. He proceeds then to ask how then can we imagine inhabitants of other worlds or the existence of a primal Power of which the laws of mind persuade us. "These thoughts are also to be included in the catalogue of existence; they are modes in which thoughts are combined." He proceeds to an idea deriving from Berkeley. "Thoughts, or ideas, or notions, call them what you will, differ from each other, not in kind, but in force." There is no essential difference, he asserts, between ideas commonly held, such as those "called *real*, or *external objects*" and those which "affect only a few . . . such as hallucinations, dreams, and the ideas of madness." However thoughts may vary "they are all thoughts; the principle of their disagreement consists in the variety and irregularity of the occasions on which they arise in the mind." They differ only as to the "various degrees of force . . . to be established between them."

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He then proceeds, in a paragraph suggestive of Hartley, to consider a measurement of ideas from the faintest of impressions to simple combinations and then combinations more complex the extreme of which "constitutes what we call the universe." Of our own existence we have an intuitive consciousness. Of the existence of other minds our conviction is not an intuition but a deduction from analogy. We are led by the laws of thought to infer "that the precise limits of our actual ideas are not the actual limits of possible ideas." The external universe which alters its relation to the individual mind moves, as we say, and conveys to us in its relative position to us the sense of past, present, and future. The diversity of experience which we call events or objects is essential to the existence of the human mind. Without this movement and change, sensation and imagination would cease.

"We do not attend sufficiently to what passes within ourselves." We plagiarize, assuming the opinions of others. "Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed." We can acquire a fresher point of view "by strict scepticism concerning all assertions, ... by scrupulous and strong attention to the mysteries of our own nature.... We ought resolutely to compel the mind to a rigid examination of itself.... Metaphysics may be defined as the science of all that we know, feel, remember and believe: inasmuch as our knowledge, sensations, memory and faith constitute the universe considered relatively to human identity." It is a science of facts, not to be confounded with logic, which is only a science of words, an instrument useful to metaphysics. Aristotle, Locke, and others "gave Logic the name of Metaphysics." Inductive science while professing "to deduce... conclusions from indisputable facts" too seldom does so. It assumes common preconceptions or mistakes a name for a thing. "The science of mind possesses eminent advantages over every other with regard to the certainty of the conclusions which it affords." It asks "no more than a minute and accurate attention to facts." These facts lie within ourselves. "We are ourselves the depositories of the evidence of the subject which we consider."

If anyone could "give a faithful history of his being, from the earliest epochs of his recollection, a picture would be presented such as the world has never contemplated before. A mirror would be held up to all men in which they might behold their own recollections." Only with difficulty can thought "visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards.... The caverns of the mind

are obscure, and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals." The passage is not in itself particularly noteworthy, but in it Shelley employs two figures of speech which are to become of the first importance in his poetic vocabulary, that of the stream, which becomes his symbol of existence, of the unceasing flow of mind; and that of the cave, which he employs both of human existence shut away from reality, and of the individual mind shut within itself and finding truth only from its inner illumination, an illumination later symbolized as the fountain, the intellectual fountain in the figure employed by Proclus. The employment of these figures so early as 1815 and in a philosophical discussion seems to me significant, suggesting what I believe to be true, that Shelley's later symbolism is intellectually rather than emotionally derived; and also that the development of his mind and of his poetic genius was from within outward, his abstract and metaphysical thought seeking its expression in the external world of objects. This, if true, is contrary to the usual conception of poetic development, and, in all likelihood, contrary to the mental history of most poets.

The errors of philosophers, Shelley declares, have mostly "arisen from considering the human being in a point of view too detailed and circumscribed. He is not a moral, and an intellectual,—but also, and pre-eminently, an imaginative being." The whole of the mind and the whole of the universe must be considered if we are to arrive at knowledge. "It imports little to inquire whether thought be distinct from the objects of thought. The use of the words *external* and *internal*, as applied to the establishment of this distinction, has been the symbol and the source of much dispute. This is merely an affair of words, and as the dispute deserves, to say, that when speaking of the objects of thought, we indeed only describe one of the forms of thought—or that, speaking of thought, we only apprehend one of the operations of the universal system of beings." For this last word Forman suggests that "things" is the proper emendation, a correction evidently sound. The Berkeleyan and Platonic character of the passage is unmistakable. Shelley has formally repudiated materialism. The universe is not wholly matter but wholly thought. The terms employed are not especially important but rather the erasure of the distinction between thought and the objects of thought. These are but names or aspects of the one reality. Platonic, too, is the importance ascribed in the mental life to imagination. To the neo-Platonists imagination is the creative power of the mind

and the link between the lower understanding of man and the divine mind in which exists reality. Shelley in his more matured thought ascribes to the imagination an importance like that ascribed to it by Proclus and Synesius. In this fragment of 1815 lies then another germinal idea presumably derived from some neo-Platonic source or from some Transcendental philosopher whose thought is neo-Platonic in origin.

The concluding brief chapter of the *Speculations* has to do with dreams and is a beginning of that introspective study which he has previously advocated. His comments on his recollected dreams are almost wholly personal. But one statement only seems to me of philosophic note: "In dreams, images acquire associations peculiar to dreaming; so that the idea of a particular house, when it recurs a second time in dreams, will have relation with the idea of the same house, in the first time, of a nature entirely different from that which the house excites when seen or thought of in relation to waking ideas." He then relates an event which "happened five years ago at Oxford." In the autumn he and a friend, Hogg presumably, while out walking came upon a scene which Shelley describes with some particularity, "a tame uninteresting assemblage of objects." But "I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream of long—here I was obliged to leave off, overcome by thrilling horror." It was this incident which enabled Mrs. Shelley to date the *Speculations* as written in 1815, to which allocation the Oxford allusion is corroborative evidence. Why the resemblance of scene and dream excited this "thrilling horror" does not appear. Nor should the episode itself be unduly stressed, for the experience is not rare. It shows no more, I suspect, than what might be easily guessed of Shelley, that his subconsciousness, as we conveniently designate that part of the mental life of which we know so little, obtruded frequently into his consciousness. Men of great creative power, it may be, tap this reservoir of thought and experience—the larger mind of the universe, the sum of all human thought, or what you will—more easily than those with duller wits. They derive from intuition what the less gifted acquire, and that imperfectly, by the slower processes of reason.

Of the *Speculations on Morals* but a few pages exist of what was seemingly designed to be an extensive work. How seriously Shelley contemplated these various prose projects it is not easy to say. During the Italian years, when he was free to write as never before with a minimum of distraction, his work, with the notable exceptions of

the *Defence of Poetry* and the *Philosophical View of Reform*, is wholly in verse. These earlier metaphysical and philosophical projects he did not take up anew; the thinking to which they were anticipatory is manifest in *Prometheus*, *Hellas*, and other poems. It seems likely, then, that these prose notes and fragments were put down more to clarify Shelley's ideas than to outline works which he seriously considered writing. Their value lies in indicating what Shelley was thinking about in the years immediately preceding his best poetry and in that poetry their fruits are manifest. The poetry is, indeed, intelligible only as the prose fragments are understood.

The *Speculations on Morals* Forman ascribes to "probably about the year 1815." But this is admittedly a guess. It suffices, I think, merely to place them before *The Revolt of Islam*. In discussing the plan of his projected work Shelley writes that it is "restricted to the development of the elementary principles of morals." It is due, he says, to the "misguided imaginations of men" that "the principal direct service which metaphysical science can bestow upon moral science" is in "ascertaining of what *is not true*." It is a more constructive service he set himself. "Moral science itself is the doctrine of the voluntary actions of man, as a sentient and social being. These actions depend on the thoughts in his mind." We must, he says, examine a "mass of popular opinion, from which the most enlightened persons are seldom wholly free," in order to arrive at conclusions upon the regulations of our minds and our conduct towards our fellow beings. His expression "voluntary actions" implies seemingly a power within us to control both thought and conduct. If so, he has then at the time of this essay perceived the inconsistency, which he had earlier denied, of reconciling benevolent conduct with a necessitarian philosophy! It is the deliberate cultivation of the benevolent feelings which he proposes in this essay, the end being the greatest happiness of the greatest number, not the sum total of the greatest happiness limited to a few or to a class, but happiness equitably distributed according to desert. Virtue is the disposition of the individual to promote this object. "The two constituent [parts] of virtue, benevolence and justice, are correlative with these two great portions of the only true object of all voluntary actions."

The object of moral science is to regulate the influence of our actions upon the happiness of others. That which produces pleasure is called good; that which produces pain, evil. "When a human being is the active instrument of generating or diffusing happiness, the principle through which it is most effectually instrumental to that



purpose, is called virtue." Benevolence and justice combined constitute virtue. But why "should a man be benevolent and just?" By nature "he is revengeful, proud, and selfish. Wherefore should he curb these propensities?" It is only that by doing so he increases the general happiness. But what is the principle in our nature that leads us to this conviction and makes us wish to increase happiness? A child, he concludes, only tardily comes to understand that others feel pain as he does. "An infant, a savage, and a solitary beast is selfish, because its mind is incapable of receiving an accurate intimation of the nature of pain as existing in beings resembling itself." Those more civilized and of more cultivated powers feel more acutely the sufferings of others. They have learned to sympathize. "Every one has experience of the fact, that to sympathize with the sufferings of another, is to enjoy a transitory oblivion of his own." It is imagination which teaches us this power of sympathy. It is upon imagination that every "gradation of... progress, nay, every, the minutest, change, depends.... The only distinction between the selfish man and the virtuous man is, that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow limit, whilst that of the latter embraces a comprehensive circumference.... Selfishness is the offspring of ignorance and mistake." The "theories which have refined and exalted humanity... have been based upon the elementary emotions of disinterestedness, which we feel to constitute the majesty of our nature." Patriotism and chivalry were based on the theory of self-sacrifice. The power of love lies in its disinterestedness. Though all three, patriotism, chivalry, and love, "have been the fountains of enormous mischief" they yet show that "man is capable of desiring and pursuing good for its own sake."

The benevolent propensities are "inherent in the human mind. We are impelled to seek the happiness of others." But benevolence, to which we yield for our own gratification, must be regulated by justice unless it is to work harm. Justice, too, is "an elementary law of human nature.... If ten men are ship-wrecked on a desert island, they distribute whatever subsistence may remain to them, into equal portions among themselves." It is the nature of the human mind that it should "desire that the advantages to be enjoyed by a limited number of persons should be enjoyed equally by all." Benevolence and justice are then as innate as selfishness and selfishness diminishes with the growth of sympathy born of imagination. Though Shelley in its practical, its social effects is thus evidently an adherent of the greatest happiness principle of the Utilitarians, he avoids the weakness of the

argument based on enlightened selfishness which antagonized later such men as Carlyle. Shelley, as did Hazlitt, argued that unselfishness or benevolence was as inherent and primal a desire or need in human nature as selfishness. And to this he adds, deriving it, perhaps, from the Platonic tradition, the imagination as the transforming, the civilizing, force in subduing the savage and selfish instincts. Benevolence may bring happiness, but it is not the selfish pursuit of happiness that makes man benevolent.

To the objector to the system Shelley has proposed, who persists in demanding "Wherefore should a man be benevolent and just?" the author replies that he has given the answer. It is of the nature of man to desire to be so. We do not exact a moral reason for a mathematical or metaphysical fact. Nor will the author enter into controversy with those who argue from the standpoint of revealed religion. Neither the promised rewards of heaven nor the punishments of hell can in any way alter the intrinsic virtue or viciousness of conduct. A tyrant may impose standards of right and wrong which the virtuous will deny even though under penalty of terrible punishments, thereby increasing their virtue. The moral system which Shelley proposes is, as we should expect, individualistic, Protestant in character. The seat of authority resides in the individual heart. Nor do the seeming uniformity of conduct, the observance of common standards, the habits of groups and classes of men diminish the importance of the individual's conduct. Its details are like those of no other man's. Both for happiness and unhappiness he has a vast influence upon those around him. "These are the actions, and such as these, which make human life what it is, and are the fountains of all the good and evil with which its entire surface is so widely and impartially overspread; and though they are called minute, they are called so in compliance with the blindness of those who cannot estimate their importance." Most of our external conduct is controlled by agencies outside ourselves: tradition, government, religion, domestic habits. "Internally all is conducted otherwise; the efficiency, the essence, the vitality of actions, derives its colour from what is no ways contributed to from any external source.... We consider our own nature too superficially. We look on all that in ourselves with which we can discover a resemblance in others; and consider those resemblances as the materials of moral knowledge. It is in the differences that it actually consists." Shelley seems then to postulate a degree of freedom to the individual moral will and its growth through sympathy born of the exercise of the imagination. Therein

lies in germ the moral theme more fully and greatly set forth in *Prometheus Unbound*.<sup>1</sup>

*A System of Government by Juries*: "This remarkable fragment," as Forman characterizes it, is of uncertain date. It is of Godwinian derivation clearly. Godwin had expressed in *Political Justice* the belief that juries were competent to pass upon all disputes between persons and in his program for a reformed political society delegated to juries the tasks now done by courts and lawyers. Juries were to be the judicial expression of public opinion and public opinion was to rule the state. Shelley expressly limits the scope of his proposed essay to the administration of law, putting aside all fundamental, all constitutional, problems of government. His proposed government by juries is a device wherewith to do away with legal delays and venalities and insure a justice which does not now prevail. He believes "that the principles on which punishment is usually inflicted are essentially erroneous." Vengeance, exasperated by fear, he thinks the main incentive of criminal justice. In property cases he believes that courts favor the rich as against the poor. Were public opinion as expressed by juries to pass upon criminal and civil cases, no longer would "the most exploded violations of humanity maintain their ground . . . after public opinion has branded them with reprobation." For "public opinion would never long stagnate in error, were it not fenced about and frozen over by forms and superstitions." The common sense and innate love of justice in an ordinary jury would enable it to decide disputes fairly were it unhampered by legal precedent and procedure. There is in this proposal nothing either novel or radical. It reveals Shelley's characteristic impatience with traditional institutions and intrenched privilege and his youthful faith in human nature when unperverted by custom and precedent.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>An even briefer fragment is one on *Reform* which, in view of Shelley's essay on that theme, may be merely a chance paragraph recording a note for subsequent elaboration. Its tone is conservative and suggests therefore a date of composition relatively late.<sup>1</sup> The thesis is that some reform of government is about to be effected. "The distribution of wealth, no less than the spirit by which it is upheld and that by which it is assailed, render the event inevitable. Call it reform or revolution, as you will, a change must take place; one of the consequences of which will be the wresting of political power from those who are at present the depositories of it. A strong sentiment prevails in the nation at large, that they have been guilty of enormous malversations of their trust." He concludes with a warning

that the liberators from the present evils may in turn become the oppressors. It would be interesting to know from what arose his distrust of professed reformers. Godwin's cold selfishness was one instance of Shelley's disillusionment with those who, claiming the noblest sentiments of altruism, proved unworthy of their professions. That Shelley had him in mind, or others, there is no evidence to show. Perhaps his cautionary doubts sprang from his maturing knowledge of mankind in general.

*On the Revival of Literature*, a fragment assigned by Rossetti and Forman to 1815, is a brief historical sketch of the revival of learning in Western Europe after the fall of Constantinople. "The small remains" of the ancient learning "filtered and degenerated as it was by the absurd mixture of Pagan and Christian philosophy, proved, on its retirement to Europe, the spark which spread gradually and successfully the light of knowledge over the world." The superstition which then prevailed was slowly dissipated by the dissemination of this ancient learning. Just how this came about is not easy to see. "Mind seems to govern the world without visible or substantial means. Its birth is unknown; its action and influence unperceived; and its being seems eternal. To the mind both humane and philosophical, there cannot exist a greater subject of grief, than the reflection of how much superstition has retarded the progress of intellect, and consequently the happiness of man." The essay briefly discusses the evils of the monastic life and the arid scholasticism which prevailed before the revival of learning. "Plato, the wisest, the profoundest, and Epicurus, the most humane and gentle among the ancients, were entirely neglected by them. Plato interfered with their peculiar mode of thinking concerning heavenly matters; and Epicurus, maintaining the rights of man to pleasure and happiness, would have offered a seducing contrast to their dark and miserable code of morals. . . . Pleasure, in an open and innocent garb by some strange process of reasoning is called vice. . . . Grecian literature—the finest the world has ever produced—was at length restored." The fragment is significant in showing one reason for Shelley's hatred of Christianity and his love of Greek culture. In paganism was a joy in living which Christianity endeavored to destroy. Shelley in his visions of an Utopian society combines the pagan joy in nature with the moral principles of Christ and the scientific outlook of the emancipated mind, endeavoring so to synthesize the best elements of all human cultures.

*The Essay on Christianity*, though unfinished in parts, is far more

extensive and complete than any other of Shelley's prose remains thus far examined with the exception of his *Address to the Irish People*.) Rossetti ascribes this essay to 1815, Forman to a rather later date. It is a mature product certainly, far removed from Shelley's opinions upon Christ as expressed in *Queen Mab* and closely approaching the opinions set forth in *Prometheus*. Briefly, Shelley is converted to Christ's ethical teaching but is still unshaken in his belief that the church, institutional Christianity in all its forms, has perverted Christ's utterances beyond recognition. "His extraordinary genius, the wide and rapid effect of his unexampled doctrines, his invincible gentleness and benignity, the devoted love borne to him by his adherents, suggested a persuasion to them that he was something divine."

The essay proceeds to discuss the concept of God as variously understood by Stoic, Platonist, Trinitarian, and others. What was Christ's understanding of the term? Neither Jupiter nor Venus nor Pan but some power transcending these, "mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things." The pure in heart, those who have preserved sanctity of soul are "aware of benignant visitings from the invisible energies" which surround them. This it is to see God. It is but another way of saying that virtue is its own reward. The pure in heart find communion with God in the beauty which they perceive in the natural world. They aspire to the divinity existing in their own hearts. "There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will." Our best powers "are the passive slaves of some higher and more omnipotent Power. This Power is God." Christ denies the existence of a Power residing outside the universe and upsetting its laws. Vengeance Christ particularly execrated, urging men to love their enemies so that they might be like the "Heavenly Father, who makes the sun to shine on the good and on the evil," a merciful and benignant God, not one of vengeance. Such a God is incapable of condemning even the vicious to an eternity of torment. "The distinction between justice and mercy was first imagined in the courts of tyrants." Julius Caesar, a tyrant, spared his political enemies, but his assassins were inspired by nobler principles. They would have sacrificed their lives if they could have made him worthy of the sacrifice. "Such are the feelings which Jesus Christ asserts to belong to the ruling Power of the world."

"God is represented by Jesus Christ as the Power from which,

and through which, the streams of all that is excellent and delightful flow.... Jesus Christ attributes to this Power the faculty of Will." He "represents God as the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world." But "some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world." Ultimately "there will come a time when the human mind shall be visited exclusively by the influence of the benignant Power." And what of death? "Another and a more extensive state of being... will follow from that mysterious change which we call Death." The power of evil does not extend beyond the grave. We shall learn all that is now mysterious and unintelligible. This is Heaven. "Human life, with all its unreal ills and transitory hopes, is as a dream.... All that it contains of pure or of divine visits the passive mind in some serenest mood." We waken after Death, Christ says, to a Paradise where "all evil and pain have ceased for ever.... We see God, and we see that he is good." If this vision is "no more than the imagination of some sublimest and most holy poet," it is, says Shelley, "a magnificent conception." We cannot believe "that Hell, or punishment, was the conception of this daring mind."

["Jesus Christ opposed with earnest eloquence the panic fears and hateful superstitions which have enslaved mankind for ages."] Retaliation for wrongs suffered was the generally recognized principle which governed the relations of states. For the burning of Sardis the Persians sought long to lay Athens waste and were in turn destroyed by Alexander. "The emptiness and folly of retaliation are apparent from every example which can be brought forward." Yet it is the legacy of mankind and men "have not failed to attribute to the Universal Cause a character analogous with their own.... The conceptions which any nation or individual entertains of the God of its popular worship may be inferred from their own actions and opinions, which are the subjects of their approbation among their fellowmen.... The perfection of the human and the divine character is... asserted to be the same. Man, by resembling God, fulfils most accurately the tendencies of his nature; and God comprehends within himself all that constitutes human perfection... the *abstract* perfection of the human character is the type of the *actual* perfection of the divine." Malevolence is impossible to such a God, for he is "the principle of all good, the source of all happiness.... But the interpreters of his doctrines have confounded the good and the evil principle.... Jesus Christ expressly asserts that distinction between

the good and evil principle which it has been the practice of all theologians to confound."

We learn of Christ only through the "imperfect and obscure information which his biographers (persons certainly of very undisciplined and indiscriminating minds) have transmitted to posterity. These writers (our only guides) impute sentiments to Jesus Christ which flatly contradict each other." Yet it is not difficult, Shelley avers, to detect the true and the false. "They have left sufficiently clear indications of the genuine character of Jesus Christ to rescue it forever from the imputations cast upon it by their ignorance and fanaticism." We know Christ to be the "enemy of oppression and falsehood...the advocate of equal justice," and not disposed "to sanction bloodshed [nor] deceit, under whatsoever pretences their practice may be vindicated." It is inconceivable that he said to return good for evil in order thereby to heap coals of fire on your enemy's head. Such a saying would contradict his true and essential character. In every human mind there are "peculiar images which reside in the inner cave of thought"—a figure, incidentally, which is to become a familiar one in Shelley's subsequent writing and derived from the symbolism of the Platonic philosophy. These ideas "constitute the essential and distinctive character of every human being." It is by them that we test the genuineness of words and actions attributed to such a being. Christ had of necessity to accommodate his doctrines to the prepossessions of those whom he addressed. He professed to restore the purity of ancient beliefs, and in so doing succeeded in commanding the attention of his hearers. This is not an unworthy artifice. All reformers have been compelled to practice it. "Truth cannot be communicated until it is perceived."

Having secured the favor of his hearers, "Jesus Christ proceeds to qualify, and finally to abrogate, the system of the Jewish law." He declares it insufficient as a code of moral conduct. "He tramples upon all received opinions, on all the cherished luxuries and superstitions of mankind. He bids them cast aside the chains of custom and blind faith by which they have been encompassed from the very cradle of their being, and receive the imitator and minister of the Universal God." He proceeds then to preach the equality of mankind, to express all that Plato and Diogenes have said on this theme, both of whom perceived the misery of man in his present social state and devised means for his enfranchisement, Plato in his scheme of a republic, Diogenes by inculcating a sense of moral dignity in the individual and teaching him to despise ostentation and wealth.

Diogenes urged men to decrease their physical wants and thus learn to be free men. For the truly wise there should be a community of external possessions./

"If there be no love among men, whatever institutions they may frame must be subservient to . . . the continuance of inequality. . . . He who sees through the hollowness of their professions should fly from their society, and suffice to his own soul. . . . The only perfect and genuine republic is that which comprehends every living being. . . . You ought to love all mankind; nay, every individual of mankind." The paraphrase is ostensibly of Diogenes and merges rather obscurely into what Shelley contends to be the teachings of Christ. These doctrines he declares Christ likewise upholds and expounds.

Shelley proceeds with his paraphrase of the liberal doctrine which he ascribes both to Diogenes and Christ, urging the curbing of material desires that the innumerable wants of heart and mind may be satisfied. With man it has been the meaner wants which he has gratified, enslaving himself thereby to base passions, a blind idolatry of fame, power, and gold. Man to be free "must cast aside the chains of habit and superstition; he must strip sensuality of its pomp, and selfishness of its excuses." These, essentially, were the doctrines of Christ as they "have been the doctrines of every just and compassionate mind that ever speculated on the social nature of man." The doctrine of the equality of man has been advocated at various times in the world's history, most notably by Rousseau, who in feeling and understanding "resembles most nearly the mysterious sage of Judea." Neither Christ nor Rousseau, in preaching the beauty of the simple life, desired mankind to abandon all the arts and sciences and cease to till their fields. They wished only that men might subordinate their material desires to spiritual needs. It is impossible to serve two masters, to worship both God and Mammon. "It is impossible at once to be high-minded and just and wise, and to comply with the accustomed forms of human society, seek power, wealth, or empire, either from the idolatry of habit, or as the direct instruments of sensual gratification." Clothing, food, and shelter should be equally shared by all. They are common needs but they are not the end of life. "The man who has fewest bodily wants approaches nearest to the Divine Nature. Satisfy these wants at the cheapest rate, and expend the remaining energies of your nature in the attainment of virtue and knowledge."

"In proportion as mankind becomes wise—yes, in exact proportion to that wisdom—should be the extinction of the unequal system under



which they now subsist. Government is, in fact, the mere badge of their depravity." Society as it now exists "is infected by an insidious poison." The ancient poets, perceiving this truth, taught that mankind had once been equal and happy in the reign of Saturn but "had gradually degenerated from the virtue which enabled them to enjoy or maintain this happy state. Their doctrine was philosophically false. Later and more correct observations have instructed us that uncivilized man is the most pernicious and miserable of beings, and that the violence and injustice, which are the genuine indications of real inequality, obtain in the society of these beings without palliation." A most interesting passage this in its repudiation of the Golden Age and the natural man theory. That Shelley continued to be haunted by the idea of a Golden Age, inconsistent as it is with an evolutionary faith in man's rise from lower forms of life, is, however, evident in his allusions to it in *Prometheus Unbound* where, whether for poetic or other reasons, it reappears to perplex somewhat his mature philosophy of evil and the entrance of evil into the world. More clearly in the *Essay on Christianity* Shelley explains the legendary Golden Age. The ancient poets, indeed, referred to the past what was no more than a dream of the future. "Their imaginations of a happier state of human society were referred, in truth, to the Saturnian period; they ministered, indeed, to thoughts of despondency and sorrow. But they were the children of airy hope—the prophets and parents of man's futurity. Man was once as a wild beast; he has become a moralist, a metaphysician, a poet, and an astronomer." Shelley adds in a note, "Jesus Christ foresaw what the poets retrospectively imagined."

The system of equality which Christ taught, "the abolition of artificial distinctions among mankind," was attempted by his followers after his death. But "after the transitory glow of enthusiasm had faded from the minds of men, precedent and habit resumed their empire." Demagogues "artfully silenced the voice of the moral sense among them by engaging them to attend, not so much to the cultivation of a virtuous and happy life in this mortal scene, as to the attainment of a fortunate condition after death." The system of equality no longer prevailed nor community of goods. But though the experiment failed it was not without effect. It is an evidence of the "victorious progress of truth and justice." Authority in morals and religion derives neither from novelty nor antiquity. The doctrines of Christ had but "the smallest resemblance to the Jewish law." Yet similar doctrines had been taught by the most eminent philosophers

of Greece. "Nothing would be gained by the establishment of the originality of Jesus Christ's doctrines but the casting a suspicion upon its practicability." We should beware of losing "the inestimable advantages of its simplicity. . . . An established religion turns to death-like apathy the sublimest ebullitions of most exalted genius, and the spirit-stirring truths of a mind inflamed with the desire of benefiting mankind. It is the characteristic of a cold and tame spirit to imagine that such doctrines as Jesus Christ promulgated are destined to follow the fortunes and share the extinction of a popular religion."

The *Essay on Christianity* is a mature work. The Shelley of *Queen Mab* and of the *Address to the Irish People* seems almost another person. They have certain beliefs in common, to be sure, faith in the perfectibility of man, the attainment of some Golden Age. But the mature Shelley, though an idealist, is not visionary, is under no illusion that the world is to be soon transformed by appeals to reason. Reason has already assumed a subordinate place, and emotion, intuition, and the imagination are the mental powers upon which he relies for the changes which are someday to transform human life. Christ, for him, has become a poet, one with an intuitive understanding of the divine forces immanent in the world. Belief in Christ and Christ's teaching does not depend upon historical prophecy or the evidence of miraculous happenings, but upon Christ's resemblance to other great poets and teachers and to the intuitive response which his words and character excite in the hearts of all good and imaginative men. It is the dream of equality and fraternity which in part links Christ with philosophers both before and after him and this it is which most appeals to Shelley. Yet Shelley is not unaware of the beauty of Christ's doctrine of a love which forswears vengeance and which does not discriminate between justice and mercy. To the mystical belief that good casts out evil Shelley is already perceptibly attracted; it was a belief destined to a chief place in his ultimate philosophy. That Shelley should be drawn to Christ's teachings, to his character and point of view, was inevitable once he was able to distinguish clearly between Christ and ecclesiasticism. For Christ is one of the moral leaders of individualists, one of the greatest of Protestants, akin to the mystics and Platonists and all others who believe that our perception of divinity is an intuition of the heart. Such men—Socrates and Christ—and their followers, such as Shelley, are inevitably rebels. For, when beliefs are once crystallized in institutions, in Church and State, the life goes out of them. They are forever a clog upon the fresh revelation of divinity, which is a continuous and ever-changing

thing like life itself. God must declare himself anew to every generation and to every individual therein. 1

It has somewhat the effect of an anticlimax, after the mature and relatively finished *Essay on Christianity*, to resume the consideration of the fragments which close the second volume of Forman's edition of Shelley's prose. The dates of all are uncertain and are to be inferred only from inherent evidence, which is not sufficiently precise. Yet all reveal some aspect, however slight, of Shelley's thought and though it would be desirable, were it possible, to ascertain the exact place of each composition in Shelley's intellectual history, the inability to do so is not fatal to any final estimate of his thought. The greater works of his last period can be definitely assigned their proper places. All that precedes is anticipatory of them and suggests in imperfect form ideas which are there more fully expressed. The first of the essays, brief and obviously incomplete, *The Elysian Fields*, is seemingly addressed to the Prince Regent, whose accession to the throne could not, in the nature of things, be far distant.

The unidentified character who speaks dwells in the Elysian Fields, whose residents "are not exempted from the enjoyments and the sufferings of mortality." Nor do they "resign those opinions, even those which the grave has utterly refuted." Frederick of Prussia, recently arrived, "persists in maintaining that 'death is an eternal sleep' to the great discomfiture of Philip the Second of Spain; who, on the furies refusing to apply the torture, expects the roof of Tartarus to fall upon his head, and laments that at least in his particular instance, the doctrine should be false." Religion, it seems, is the chief subject of discussion, everyone clinging to the beliefs he held on earth. The speaker, however, finds political science more to his mind as "capable of certain conclusions," as having a practical character. It is, therefore, as a political philosopher that the speaker addresses one who is "to ascend the throne of England." Suggesting that "there are better examples to emulate than those who have only refrained from depraving or tyrannizing over their subjects, because they remembered the fates of Pisistratus and Tarquin," the speaker remarks that if the heir apparent is dominated by generosity and virtue "my lessons can hardly be needed." Seemingly he fears, however, that "all thirst of genuine excellence" may have been extinguished by "the discipline of a narrow education." Whereupon he begins the exposure of "the state in which the nation will be found at your accession." The fragment thereupon concludes with a brief paragraph: "The English nation does not, as has been imagined, in-

herit freedom from its ancestors. Public opinion rather than positive institution maintains it in whatever portion it may now possess, which is in truth the acquirement of their own incessant struggles. As yet the gradations by which this freedom has advanced have been contested step by step."

*On the Devil and Devils* has all the appearance of a complete essay, written in a lighter style than is Shelley's wont. It treats of the Devil and the various conceptions of this mythical personage in a pleasantly ironic vein which incidentally discloses considerable knowledge in varied fields of philosophy and science. It is this knowledge which constitutes the chief interest in the essay for those who seek to measure Shelley's intellectual background. Shelley's reading is clearly wide, extending from philosophy, religion, and mythology to literature and science. Of books he was, to employ that much abused word, omnivorous. Though a fact sufficiently obvious upon the most superficial survey of Shelley's life and work, yet it and the implications of it are curiously little appreciated. The vitality of erroneous beliefs is not the least extraordinary fact in an extraordinary world. Shelley, in the popular conception an emotional visionary mooning about the world addressing poems to clouds and skylarks, cannot be reconciled with the studious youth who read twelve or sixteen hours a day and was curious of all fields of knowledge. The popular mind has its own peculiar notions of what a poet is. Therefore in the face of all evidence Shelley remains to many people otherwise intelligent no more than an amiable idiot with an unaccountable gift of song and a strange fascination for women. I scarcely exaggerate. The Ariel of M. Maurois' caricature is little more than this. It is not Shelley who is the romanticist. Shelley was a realist who endeavored to see the world as it is and to explain it. It is the world which is incurably romantic and chooses to ignore that picture of itself which the realists—the great poets—draw of it for its improvement.

"The Manichæan philosophy," Shelley observes, "if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts." It "is simply a personification of the struggle which we experience within ourselves, and which we perceive in the operations of external things as they affect us, between good and evil." The notions of God and Devil derive from the human practice of abstracting these principles and personifying them. The Devil, Shelley thinks, "was clearly a Chaldaean invention." The Devil is, to be sure, mentioned in the book of Job, but that great poem, Shelley believes, was not written by a Jew at all. The Greek philosophers "dispensed with the agency

of the Devil," and though personifying the cause of the universe in some instances, accounted for evil by supposing matter to be external. "God, in making the world, made not the best that he, or even inferior intelligence could conceive; but... moulded the reluctant and stubborn materials ready to his hand, into the nearest arrangement possible to the perfect archetype existing in his contemplation." Had the materials been better he would have made a better world. This conception the Christian theologians rejected as "incompatible with the omnipotence of God." They sought "to reconcile omnipotence and benevolence, and equity, in the author of an universe, where evil and good are inextricably entangled, and where the most admirable tendencies to happiness and preservation are for ever baffled by misery and decay." They, "therefore, invented or adopted the Devil to extricate them from this difficulty."

Heaven in the vulgar belief is "a certain airy region inhabited by the Supreme Being and a multitude of inferior Spirits." These latter like all other beings were supposedly "created by God, with foresight of the consequences which would result from the mechanism of their nature." For some reason they were not "so perfect as he could wish." It is believed by some that these creatures were endowed with free-will. God so created them "that he might excuse himself to his own conscience for tormenting and annoying these unfortunate spirits, when they provoked him by turning out worse than he expected." This theory as to the origin of evil, Shelley remarks, "does not seem more complimentary to the Supreme Being, or less derogatory to his omnipotence and goodness, than the Platonic scheme." Among the spirits so created one took it into his head to rebel and, after "a series of desperate conflicts" he and his cohorts were expelled from Heaven "and driven into a place called Hell... where God reserved them, first to be the tempters, and then the jailors and tormentors of a new race of beings, whom he created under the same conditions of imperfection, and with the same foresight of an unfortunate result." Milton's Devil "is very different from the popular personification of evil.... Milton's Devil, as a moral being, is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in a purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy.... It is difficult to determine," says Shelley, "whether Milton was a Christian or not, at the period of the composition of *Paradise Lost*." Yet when Christianity shall have completely decayed it will probably not be wholly forgotten only because

"it will have participated in the eternity of genius," for Milton divesting the Devil of sting, hoof, and horns, "clothed him with the sublime grandeur of a graceful but tremendous spirit."

Shelley deplors the laxity of belief in the moderns respecting the Devil. It is evidence of the decay of Christianity. "Depend upon it, that when a person once begins to think that perhaps there is no Devil, he is in a dangerous way." Hell is become but a metaphor of a guilty conscience. Dr. Johnson was the "last man of considerable talents who shewed any serious attachment to the ancient faith" and believed in eternal damnation, that one could be "sent to Hell and punished everlastingly." The Devil of the old faith is "at once the Informer, the Attorney General, and the jailor of the Celestial tribunal." Shelley thinks it not good policy or "constitutional practice, to unite these characters." The accused will have very little chance and the Devil's winnings will be considerable. "If the Devil takes but half the pleasure of tormenting a sinner which God does, who took the trouble to create him, and then to invent a system of casuistry by which he might excuse himself for devoting him to eternal torment, this reward must be considerable. . . . Tiberius, or Bonaparte or Lord Castlereagh, never affixed any reward to the disclosure or the creation of conspiracies, equal to that which God's Government has attached to the exertions of the Devil to tempt, betray, and accuse unfortunate man." It is a partnership in which "the dirty work is done by the Devil. . . . To tempt mankind to incur everlasting damnation, must, on the part of God, and even on the part of the Devil, arise from that disinterested love of tormenting and annoying, which is seldom observed on earth. The thing that comes nearest to it is a troupe of idle dirty boys baiting a cat. . . . It is pretended that God dislikes it, but this is mere shamefacedness and coquetting, for he has everything his own way and he need not damn unless he likes."

The Devil, having been made as he is by God, has a far better justification for his conduct. The fault was with the watchmaker, not the watch. But there is yet another explanation for the Devil's conduct. He is forced by God to do those things he abhors. "He is for ever tortured with compassion and affection for those whom he betrays and ruins; he is racked by a vain abhorrence for the desolation of which he is the instrument." Being immortal there is no refuge for him in death. The extent of the Devil's operations is considerable but "the sphere of the operations . . . is difficult to determine," for the latest discoveries of astronomy have radically altered our notions of the universe. The newer telescopes discover "a prodigious multi-

tude of suns. . . . If these incalculable millions of suns, planets, satellites, and comets are inhabited, is it to be supposed that God formed their inhabitants better, or less liable to offend him than those primordial spirits, those angels near his throne, those first and most admirable of his creatures, who rebelled and were damned?" In so vast a universe is the Devil omnipresent with God, or does he send his emissaries, a host of subordinate Devils, to the other worlds? As to the number of devils there can be no objection for there is a "droll story" of Christ having driven a legion of them in a herd of pigs which hurled themselves into a lake, "a set of hypochondriacal and high-minded swine very unlike any others of which we have authentic record." And what became of the devils? Did they enter into fish and so again perchance into human beings?

It is supposed by some that animals, especially domestic animals, are the homes of devils so that tyranny over animals is "an unconscious piece of retaliation" for the injuries done men by devils. Lord Erskine's bill "For the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (first proposed in 1809 but not passed until 1822) might thus be better entitled "An Act for the better protection of the Devils." How precisely Devils may inhabit the bodies of men save as parasites internal or external does not appear. Nor where may be the home of the Devils unless the sun or the various suns. "The Magian worship of the Sun as the creator and Preserver of the world, is considerably more to the credit of the inventors." It was indeed, "next to pure deism or a personification of all the powers whose agency we know or can conjecture, the religion attended by the fewest evil consequences." If the Devil makes the sun the centre of the universe, the seat of Hell, where does God reside? If the "circumference of existence" may not the "mixture of good and evil, harmony and discord, beauty and deformity, production and decay . . . the general laws of the moral and material world" spring from the conflict of the two opposed forces in the world, the centripetal and the centrifugal? The theologian does not trouble "his fancy with nonsense . . . so philosophical."

Hell, whether in the sun or "distributed among the comets . . . floating prisons of intense and inextinguishable fire," is always a fruitful theme for poetry. Horror and superstition stir men more readily than beauty. "It often requires a higher degree of skill in a poet to make beauty, virtue, and harmony poetical . . . than to make injustice, deformity and discord poetical." Many know Dante's *Inferno* but few read the *Purgatorio*, which is a finer poem. That the sun is the home of the damned and the Devil and his imps is unlikely. Comets

would serve better as hells were it not, however, for the possibility of their "orbits gradually becoming ecliptical," whereupon they would become cool and comfortable worlds. But there is again no certainty that either sun or comets are even now burning, for Herschel has discovered that the cause of light and heat in the sun is the shell of "phosphoric vapors," not the burning body of the sun itself. The rents in this outer envelope known as sun-spots, disclose probably the opaque body of the sun, which may not be much hotter than the planets. "Not to mention that the devils may be like the animalculæ in mutton broth, whom you may boil as much as you please, but they will always continue alive and vigorous."

The Christians in their mythology, in the creation of the Devil, destroyed the poetical imaginings of the Greeks in the conception of Sylvans, Fauns, and Pan. "The Christians contrived to turn the wrecks of the Greek mythology as well as the little they understood of their philosophy, to purposes of deformity and falsehood." The personification of the Devil as a serpent is intelligible enough, though, "among the Greeks the Serpent was considered as an auspicious and favourable being. . . . In Egypt the Serpent was an hieroglyphic of eternity." The punishment ascribed in Jewish mythology to the Serpent because of its tempting Adam and Eve is that henceforth it should crawl upon its belly. "We are given to suppose, that before this misconduct it hopped along upon its tail; a mode of progression which, if I was a Serpent, I should think the severer punishment of the two. The Christians have turned this Serpent into their Devil, and accommodated the whole story to their new scheme of sin and propitiation."—So Shelley concludes an essay which reveals in him a streak of whimsicality not usual. Yet beneath the light tone is a very evident concern with the philosophical problem of evil and of the nature of God, who, if omnipotent, cannot be benevolent; and if benevolent must contend in uncertain strife with evil for the domination of the world. Shelley's philosophical and theological speculation has already ranged far and the scope of his reading in theology, philosophy, myth, and science is manifestly extensive.

There is but one further fragment to consider in this somewhat uncertain period 1814-1815, three paragraphs of *An Essay on Friendship*. "The nature of love and friendship is very little understood, and the distinctions between them ill-established. This latter feeling—at least a profound and sentimental attachment to one of the same sex, often precedes the former. It is not right to say, merely, that friendship is exempt from the smallest alloy of sensuality. It rejects,



with disdain, all thoughts but those of an elevated and imaginative character. I remember forming an attachment of this kind at school. I cannot recall to my memory the precise epoch at which this took place; but I imagine it must have been at the age of eleven or twelve." Whereupon Shelley recounts the lovely episode of his childish friendship for this unnamed boy. It contains nothing germane to the history of Shelley's thought unless perhaps the character of the boy who was once Shelley. It is not easy to believe that from a character so sweet and tender, so little selfish and sensual, any ideas could come which even the world in its grossness might misinterpret after its fashion. The fearlessness of Shelley's thought springs from a spiritual wisdom and innocence such as is found often in young children but seldom in adults.

† The essays and fragments which have been the theme of this chapter, incomplete as they are and, in some instances, of uncertain chronology, are of prime importance in Shelley's intellectual history. They are the product of the transitional period between the publication of *Queen Mab* and his mature works, which begin certainly not earlier than *Alastor* and, as many would feel, with *The Revolt of Islam*. Sharply to define the stages of intellectual development is, of course, impossible. The history of a mind or the history of a life is best symbolized in Shelley's favorite image, that of the stream. Despite its shallows, rapids, and turns it is a continuous, unbroken, and homogeneous thing. Nevertheless the character of the scenery changes and the stream itself increases in volume as it flows farther from its source. ‡ The years 1814-1815 mark Shelley's development from a youthful visionary reformer to a philosopher. He does not cease to be an idealist nor does he relinquish his desire to alter human institutions. He perceives that the evils which are manifest in man's political, social, and religious life lie deeper than he had earlier conceived. Man, to change his way of life, must be intellectually converted. Reform begins with philosophy. Until he found himself philosophically, therefore, Shelley could not proceed effectively on his path as reformer. Also the instrument of reform changes. He no longer posts declarations of rights nor makes speeches. The pen is his weapon henceforth and the medium of its employment increasingly is poetry rather than prose. Good as much of Shelley's prose is, it denies him the most effective expression of the powers which his meditation upon the problems of philosophy were releasing in him. Philosophy and poetry were, to Shelley, closely allied. So he expressly declared, and his own intellectual history is evidence that it was so. /

Shelley's ideal of Utopia does not, that I can see, alter very greatly in its fundamentals from *Queen Mab* to *Prometheus*. An equalitarian society without coercion or written law, in which men live unselfishly with their kind, is the vision which is shown to the spirit of Ianthe and the reality attained by Prometheus in the overthrow of Jupiter. The immediacy of the realization of this state is, however, discrepant in the two, and the means to it psychologically very different. The conception of man and his mental world, the powers which animate him and his freedom in their employment, underwent a great change as Shelley progressed from a belief in materialism and determinism to the Berkeleyan concept of matter as but a form of thought. The Golden Age of legend, the pattern of Utopia, becomes the aspiration, the goal, of man's evolution. The poets and myth-makers had dreamed of it as of something once existent and now lost. Christ, a social reformer and poet, depicted it as the kingdom of God realizable upon earth when men should reject the bondage of custom, should relinquish their desires for power and luxury, should renounce hatred and vengeance and live in amity together. Utopia was to come at some distant, some indefinite time, when men heeded the God who dwelt within their hearts and grew to be like him. Shelley, still a hater of institutional Christianity, declares himself in the *Essay on Christianity* a convert to Christ's social ethics as revealed in his teachings. The inconsistencies in these Shelley ascribes to the mistakes and misunderstanding of those who reported his words."

The renunciation of materialism is explicit. Shelley announces himself a convert to the "intellectual system." Thoughts and objects alike are thought and this universe of thought is summed up in or permeated by that spiritual force which we name God. To it we intuitively respond in our hearts and aspire to closer union with it. Mysticism, Pantheism, neo-Platonism—these terms all serve to indicate the character of this belief without pressing too closely for a definition of what cannot, perhaps, be wholly rationalized. It is an intuition, an emotion. It must be felt to be understood. Shelley in his explanation of it shows himself akin to the early Wordsworth, to the neo-Platonic mystics, to Christ. The kingdom of God is within us if we will but see that it is there. Perceiving it, we can realize it in this world, in the relationships of human society.

The mind, Shelley declares, is not creative. In this declaration he seemingly clings to the psychology of sensation, to the school of Locke. No longer does he make a distinction between outer and inner. Objective and inner actuality are essentially the same. The

mind—or, as I believe he means, the understanding—is a mechanical instrument for the reception and classification of sensations. It does not create these. They exist only as it perceives them. But what then is the creative agency? Shelley seems to declare that this agency is the will operating through the imagination. Just how the will and imagination can achieve their purpose without ideals in patterns and why these should not be named thoughts also, is not clear to me, but Shelley apparently makes such a distinction. Creation, it is evident, demands the will, and in it and the instrument of creation, the imagination, inheres some emotional power which is lacking in thought. Moreover, God, the creative will, is morally free to achieve what it desires; and the human will, partaking of this same divine power, is to the degree of its moral freedom also able to create. It is easy to anticipate at this point Shelley's later elaboration of the idea but to do so would be to falsify his position in the period *circa* 1815. Of that we can say with assurance only that the repudiation of materialism is explicit and the acceptance of the freedom of the moral will rather more than implicit. It is, if not expressed with conviction, tentatively phrased. The point is most important. Shelley is beginning to realize that the exercise of man's innate benevolence to the attainment of Utopia, the kingdom of God on earth, is impossible unless man is morally free or capable of becoming so.

Shelley's conception of immortality necessarily alters as he passes from a belief in materialism, in which thought is merely a manifestation of matter, to a belief in the sole reality of thought. In rejecting materialism he accepts some sort of God in whose thought the universe exists. Man, intuitively sharing in God, becomes a part of God. In such a belief immortality is implicit, though not necessarily a *personal* immortality. The individual, that is, may upon death be merged with God to the loss of individual identity. I do not think that on this point Shelley was ever wholly explicit. The several allusions in *Prometheus* seem to me ambiguous. On the other hand, Shelley's strong individualism and his constant stress upon the differences of things—in all phenomena whether man or natural objects—rather than their unity—would seem to indicate at least his hope for, if not his certain belief in, a personal immortality. Diversity of expression, the seeming objective of God, would be defeated by the loss of individuality once achieved. But here again it is easy to anticipate and to enter prematurely upon Shelley's beliefs as expressed in the final period of his work.

There are numerous aspects of Shelley's thought as revealed in

the essays and fragments which repay a thoughtful consideration, but these will recur in the discussion of subsequent works. I wish only to point out two or three more. The scientific interest, astronomical chiefly, was particularly clear in the essay on the Devil. Shelley was seemingly well versed in Herschel's important discoveries, especially the explorations of space which revealed a stellar universe, or innumerable universes, of an extent never before guessed. Herschel's discoveries opened the way to modern astronomy and their significance Shelley was the first poet, so far as I am aware, imaginatively to grasp. The importance of this scientific interest to Shelley's final philosophy will later appear.

In the prose fragments it is well to note, too, the use of three symbols which Shelley subsequently employs in his verse and with philosophical implications: the stream, symbolizing the flow of existence or the individual life; the cave, as symbolizing human life shut away from reality, a symbol presumably deriving from Plato; and the serpent, symbol sometimes of knowledge, or liberty, crushed by the hostile force of tyranny but persisting. Shelley in his reference to the Gnostics is clearly aware of the significance attached to the serpent in the Gnostic philosophy, in which it is the friend, not the betrayer, of man. Shelley's symbolism was greatly to widen and deepen in his poetic practice. What is most interesting to note in his prose is that it had seemingly an intellectual origin. These symbols which he is to employ derive from neo-Platonism and other philosophies. Later I believe he added symbols of his own making though of kindred significance, each with a more or less definite philosophic meaning. In accepting these symbols and in adding others subsequently Shelley was, unconsciously perhaps, preparing for his use a medium of peculiar efficacy in the expression of philosophic ideas in the form needful for poetry. Abstract ideas told in verse must be cast in concrete imagery. For this the symbols Shelley found in neo-Platonism provided the means.

(/ And last I would stress but one further point at this time. It is evident in the essays that Shelley is becoming increasingly preoccupied with the problem of evil. How is evil reconcilable with an omnipotent if benevolent God? What accounts for the mixture of good and evil in man? How can he cast out evil? In the external world how is evil reconcilable with the beauty also evident there? It is the central question of philosophy. In it are involved the problems of God, reality, and free will./)

## CHAPTER IX

### *Reformer into Artist*



THE letters for the latter half of 1815 and the early months of 1816 are largely confined to business affairs. Shelley had taken a house at Bishopgate, near Windsor Park. Peacock, living at Marlow, visited him frequently. There were a few other friends to whom Shelley could write, Hogg, with whom he had resumed friendship being one; to him there are letters which give a little information on Shelley's reading. He writes of reading Cicero and of preferring the metaphysical essays to the orations. Lucan's *Pharsalia*, too, he read and declared it to be better than Virgil. These passages and a few titles in orders to book-dealers indicate that Shelley in these months was pursuing his classical and philosophical studies despite his uncertain health. After an excursion up the Thames with Peacock, his health was so improved that he writes, "My habitual dejection and irritability have almost deserted me, and I can devote six hours in the day to study without difficulty."

Books and, in periods of health, literary composition, were his refuge in a world in which he lived virtually as an exile, with very few friends courageous enough to combat the public opinion which professed to regard him as seducer and libertine. Such an experience no doubt toughens the human spirit when it does not kill. Shelley's disillusionment with the human race was extremely rapid and the more intense to the degree of his youthful illusions. It was his nature to live rapidly, to foreshorten experience. At the age of twenty-three, twice married, a father, a moral outcast, and in his friends betrayed where he had had the greatest faith, he was not, as he might have been, wholly crushed. He was still incredulous that the world could be so completely different from what he had thought it to be; the intellectual puzzle of reconciling his former illusions with actuality dulled somewhat the pain of his utter disenchantment. He writes to Hogg: "It excites my wonder to consider the perverted energies of the human mind. That so much benevolence and talent, as the missionary who travelled with you seemed to possess, should be wasted in such profitless endeavours, nor serve to any other end than to expose its possessor to perpetual disappointment. Yet who is there that will not pursue phantoms, spend his choicest hours in hunting after dreams,

and wake only to perceive his error and regret that death is so near? ... Even the men who hold dominion over nations fatigue themselves by the interminable pursuit of emptiest visions; the honour and power which they seek is enjoyed neither in acquirement, possession or retrospect; for what is the fame that attends the most skilful deceiver or destroyer? What the power which awakens not in its progression more wants than it can supply?"

It was to Godwin that he owed his profoundest lesson in human nature, to Godwin whose words had stirred him to youthful enthusiasm for radical reform and the perfectibility of the race.† Godwin, wholly repudiating his disciple after the elopement with Mary, refusing to recognize him, and heaping abuse upon him, nevertheless hounded him for money. His letters to Godwin in response to these demands are remarkable for their restraint and patience. Nevertheless, they are not weak, and occasionally exasperated beyond endurance, he puts his feeling in words which should, one thinks, have penetrated even Godwin's thick skin, though it does not appear that they did so. "Perhaps it is well that you should be informed that I consider your last letter to be written in a certain style of haughtiness and encroachment, which neither awes nor imposes upon me." (January 18, 1816). Again: "If you really think me vicious, such haughtiness as I imputed to you is perhaps to be excused. But I, who do not agree with you in that opinion, cannot be expected to endure it without remonstrance. I can easily imagine how difficult it must be, in addressing a person whom we despise or dislike, to abstain from phrases, the turn of which is peculiar to the sentiments with which we cannot avoid regarding such a person. Perhaps I did wrong to feel so deeply or notice so readily a spirit of which you seem to have been unconscious." (January 21, 1816). The negotiations for raising money for Godwin's use gave rise to the possible need of a meeting in London. Shelley writes: "Probably my feelings on such an occasion would not be less distressing than your own. So far as those feelings are concerned, I should certainly reluctantly entertain the idea of such an interview. But I would not sacrifice anything essential to the raising of this money to exempt myself from the sensations, however painful, which could not fail to arise on meeting a man, who having been once my friend, would receive me with cold looks and haughty words." And he adds: "Frances and Mrs. Godwin will probably be glad to hear that Mary has safely recovered from a favourable confinement, and that her child is well." (January 25.) But two more of these excerpts, painful as they are to read even now: "Yet

I do not know that it is best for you to see me. On me it would inflict deep dejection. But I would not refuse anything which I can do, so that I may benefit a man whom, in spite of his wrongs to me, I respect and love." (February 16). He had offered the other cheek sufficiently. On March 7 he writes: "The hopes which I had conceived of receiving from you the treatment and the consideration which I esteem to be justly due to me were destroyed by your letter dated the 5th. The feelings occasioned by this discovery were so bitter and so excruciating that I am resolved for the future to stifle all those expectations which my sanguine temper too readily erects on the slightest relaxation of the contempt and the neglect in the midst of which I live. I must appear the reverse of what I really am, haughty and hard, if I am not to see myself and all that I love trampled upon and outraged. Pardon me, I do entreat you, if, pursued by the conviction that where my true character is most entirely known, I have met with the most systematic injustice, I have expressed myself with violence, overlook a fault caused by your own equivocal politeness, and I will offend no more.

"We will confine our communications to business."

Against the background of loneliness and disillusionment which these excerpts from his letters suggest, Shelley's *Alastor*, published early in 1816, assumes a personal, an autobiographical significance whose quality demands exact definition. That quality is implicit in the introduction which Shelley supplied to the poem, from which I shall presently quote. But even so the poem is easily misunderstood. I am sure I for long misunderstood it and I suspect my misapprehension was not singular. My failure, until I placed the poem against the emotional background of which I have spoken, was to attribute to the poem too great a lyrical and too little of a dramatic and philosophic character. Shelley, it seemed to me, was merely telling his own story, pitying himself, a beautiful and blighted being, doomed to disappointment and death. Weak self-pity is not an endearing emotion and my early feeling for *Alastor*, despite its descriptive beauty, was one of distaste. I still think it far below Shelley's best work, beside which it is fragile, though with a definite loveliness. Yet it marks the birth of Shelley, the artist, apart from and superior to Shelley, the man, who had suffered hurt and disillusionment. To make an artist out of a man is, it has been said, a painful business. *Alastor* marks, in Shelley, the transformation. Let me try to make clear what I mean.

Much writing, both prose and poetry, is no more than autobiography more or less disguised, essentially confessional in character.

Lyric poetry is mostly so and much fiction. Its purpose is mainly to relieve the feelings of the author. It does not survey the emotion or the experience told with that detachment, that philosophic consideration of the particular instance against the background of all experience, wherein alone art resides. There is in the true work of art an impersonality which is foreign to the literature of confession; and this remains true, although the materials—emotions and incidents told—are not wholly imaginary but are in varying degrees born of the writer's actual experience. *David Copperfield* would be an instance in point. To a considerable degree it is autobiographical but the actual experiences are so objectified, so bathed with imagination, and so altered that Dickens the man is lost in Dickens the creator of a parable which illuminates life. *David Copperfield* is the apotheosis of the boy Dickens. Dickens has forgotten himself in his creation which is greater than himself. Critics, who find terms for this quality, call it universality. Impersonality more nearly expresses what I understand by it. It is this impersonality that characterizes *Alastor*. Shelley is contemplating the possible fate of such a one as himself, sensitive of spirit, who withdraws from the harsh conflicts of life, as he was himself tempted to do, and loses himself in a world of dream and illusion, pursuant of an ideal not to be realized in earthly form. That Shelley was fully conscious of such a temptation indicates his superiority to it, a superiority not maintained without conflict to the end of his days.

The title as proposed by Peacock signifies an evil genius. "The poem treated the spirit of solitude as a spirit of evil," Peacock writes. Shelley in his *Preface* says the poem is "allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind. It represents a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic to the contemplation of the universe." He searches for knowledge and admires the visible world. "But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He imagines to himself the Being whom he loves." This being he embodies in an imaginative vision which "unites all of wonderful or wise or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture. . . . He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointments, he descends to an untimely grave." Shelley is aware of the danger which attends such a denial of the social duties of life, such an absorption in ideal images. Yet those



insensible to these ideals he thinks more unfortunate than those blasted by the too solitary pursuit of them. "They who, deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt. All else, selfish, blind, and torpid, are those unforeseeing multitudes who constitute, together with their own, the lasting misery and loneliness of the world. Those who love not their fellow beings live unfruitful lives and prepare for their old age a miserable grave."<sup>1</sup>

I do not find this analysis as wholly lucid as I should like. I understand it in this wise: The selfish, blind, and unloving are those without ideals, who acknowledge nothing more than the actualities of worldly existence. Those others who are aware of the ideal world are in danger of living wholly in it because they do not find in the world of the actual that which satisfies them. Presumably the golden mean is to be found, though Shelley does not explicitly say so, in those who, aware of otherworldly ideals find in them inspiration to human love and sympathy in this mortal life. Both to misanthrope and idealist there is a form of selfishness which begets unhappiness and death. Shelley is debating his own case and that of others like him. The way of the world is harsh and self-seeking. The ideal world of imagination and thought is a way of escape. Shelley realized its allurements and its danger, a danger very real to one whom the world rebuffed and whose proffers of service it rejected with scorn. He had, it is evident, become already a partial convert to Platonism, whose influence upon his thought is evident in *Alastor*. The ideal world of poetry and philosophy for one of his gifts and temperament was no despairing alternative to a frustrated life of action. It was a place native to his spirit, the world of reality for which he yearned. He knew its seductions only too well. It would be easy, did he not feel his obligation to the world of actuality so sorely in need of redemption, to yield to it. The problem which he set himself was, I believe,

how to make the best of both. *Alastor* is the parable of one who, unlike himself, turned his back on human obligations to pursue an ideal realizable only in death.<sup>7</sup>

The Wordsworthian influence, the pantheism of *Alastor*, is evident. Poetically the lines are far and away in advance of anything Shelley had previously done. His blank verse, despite its Wordsworthian echoes, is handled with power, a power far less than that of *Prometheus* but with an unmistakable personal accent. The great "Mother of this unfathomable world" whom he invokes at the outset is akin to the "spirit which rolls through all things" but her shadow which he has watched suggests a Platonic idea not explicit in Wordsworth, the idea of the world of reality whose shadow is the world of actuality, of nature. The conception of the shadow, the actual counterpart of the real, becomes in Shelley's later and habitual employment of it a familiar symbol. Shelley first uses it here with full consciousness of its metaphysical implication. The familiar earth of nature is the shadow of the unseen loveliness and in the study of nature is to be found an intimation of the divine reality. Despite his study of death, his evocation of spirits, his practice of the occult, Shelley has, he says, not penetrated the inmost sanctuary. Yet enough has been unveiled to give him courage, and her, the Mother, Nature or the spirit animating Nature, Shelley invokes to aid his song.

There is a personal touch in the story of the youthful poet who is the hero of the poem. Like him, Shelley had sought "The fountains of divine philosophy," and like him had early left an "alienated home." The travels of the poet to the shrines of former greatness are, of course, paralleled only in Shelley's thought. The geography of the poem is borrowed from the novel he so much admired, Miss Owen's *Missionary*; and the Miltonic use of resonant place names is no more than a poetic convention. The vision of the "veiled maid" which comes to him in his wanderings is, I believe, not a convention or device but a spiritual reality, though the form in which he depicts this image of the ideal is evidently borrowed from Platonism, suggestive of the affinity or spiritual complement of the soul, whose lack makes incomplete the earthly incarnation of man. In the Platonic fable, the soul in its heavenly and complete state is both masculine and feminine and in its earthly division seeks forever a return to its previous unity. That this conception made an indelible impression on Shelley is apparent in a succession of poems in which a woman personifies this unrealized completeness, whether narrowly personal as in *Epipsychidion*, the ideal of intellectual beauty as in *The Sensi-*

*tive Plant*, or man's division from nature as personified in Asia of *Prometheus*. In Shelley these ideals of completion in beauty and in sexual love are united, and the persistence of his employment of them suggests both his yearning for the Platonic ideal of beauty, and the incompleteness of his earthly loves. His understanding of this propensity to idealization is explicit in his comment on *Epipsychidion*.

Certain figures of speech which Shelley later several times employs are also evident in *Alastor*. These lines suggest, among others, lines descriptive of Asia in *Prometheus*, and it would be possible to extort from them even in their first employment a Platonic implication though I believe this scarcely justified:

And saw by the warm light of their own life  
Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil  
Of woven wind. . . .

The figure here, as later, suggests heavenly beauty which pierces the veil cast by mortal sense, the intuitive perception which, in Blake's phrasing, sees "not with but through the eye." The transport of union with this divine apparition again suggests the mystic rapture of which Shelley writes in a poem of slightly later date, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. That the experience in *Alastor* and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* is the same and mystical in both cannot be certainly affirmed though I believe it to be so. The mystical union with the One whether thought of as union with beauty or love or the divine spirit which includes both is evidently a fact of spiritual experience. It is this of which Wordsworth writes in his more inspired moments; and the literature of neo-Platonism, and of mysticism generally, is full of similar instances. It is evidently, if its records may be believed, a transcendent experience, one beside which all other experience is pale and unsatisfying. The desire of the youthful poet of *Alastor* for permanent union with the ideal once experienced is therefore explicable. He pursues a satisfaction which is to be found only in death.

. . . Does the dark gate of death  
Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,  
O Sleep?

In his wanderings to find again the ideal maid of his vision, the poet ignores all earthly lures. Consumed with the passion of his longing he wastes away. The journey in the boat down the dark stream leads to wild uninhabited places far from human forms. All this is

simple enough and lucidly symbolical. The boat and the stream, symbols of the soul and its voyage through life, are, be it observed, employed. These are neo-Platonic in origin and Shelley in later poems employs them consciously in their neo-Platonic and symbolic meanings. Whether he does so consciously in *Alastor* cannot, again, be certainly affirmed. A stream, merely as a narrative device, sufficiently serves the geographic necessities of the poem, and a boat is the natural means by which to follow it. Yet the symbolic implication is obviously in harmony with the poem and in view of Shelley's frequent employment of these symbols later, in ways wholly similar, it is reasonable to assume his symbolic use of boat and stream. And here it may be well to remark upon a curious personal passion of Shelley's upon which all who knew him well commented, his seemingly childish delight in launching paper boats on any pond or stream. Hogg suffered on winter walks with Shelley, shivering while his friend indulged in this pastime. Perhaps the habit, unaccountable in itself—though mystics and Platonists may not deem it such—explains the thoroughness with which Shelley later employed the whole group of neo-Platonic symbols which embody water in all its forms: stream, cloud, fountain, and ocean. Already in his letters Shelley had employed fountain in its symbolic sense of intellectual inspiration. Cave also he uses with a Platonic implication. It will be interesting to observe how, in later poems, he employs these symbols and others kin to them, and with a growing sense of their suitability as poetic counters, expressing both physical facts and metaphysical theories.

One passage of *Alastor*, in which he likens the stream to his, or the poet's life, would seem to employ the neo-Platonic symbolism consciously:

... "O stream!

Whose source is inaccessibly profound,  
Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?  
Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,  
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulfs,  
Thy searchless fountain and invisible course,  
Have each their type in me; and the wide sky  
And measureless ocean may declare as soon  
What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud  
Contains thy waters, as the universe  
Tell ~~where~~ these living thoughts reside, when stretched  
Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste  
I' the passing wind!"

The figure depicts the merging of the mysterious stream of life with the universal ocean, its individual waters lost therein as the individual's living thoughts are merged, upon death, with the sea of universal thought. The same figure, more elaborately wrought, Shelley reëmploys in the first stanza of *Mont Blanc*. It will suffice in this immediate instance to note the general Platonic implication in the likening of the flow of water to the flow of thought, with its suggestion that the outer and external stream of events is but the image or shadow of the inner life of mind. Shelley, as we have seen, had already speculated upon the Berkeleyan problem of inner and outer and concluded that things and the mental response to things were, alike, only thought.

The analogy of the stream to the individual life is further symbolized in the changing character of the scene as the poet nears the place of his death:

... A gradual change was here  
 Yet ghastly. For, as fast years flow away,  
 The smooth brow gathers, and the hair grows thin  
 And white, and where irradiate dewy eyes  
 Had shone, gleam stony orbs:—so from his steps  
 Bright flowers departed....

It is a desolate and blasted scene through which he pursues his course until he discovers a "tranquil spot... even in the lap of horror." Here on the brink "of that obscurest chasm"—symbolical of death—the poet breathes his last. In the lament for his death there is no hint of hope for his survival, merely the wish that the alchemist's vision of life and power "were the true law of this so lovely world." The spirit of the poet, "the brave, the gentle, and the beautiful," departs—

... and many worms  
 And beasts and men live on...

To those who survive is left no—

... passionate tumult of a clinging hope;  
 But pale despair and cold tranquillity.

Two poems written a few months after *Alastor*, in the summer of 1816, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc*, should be considered at this point, for the Platonism therein is much more explicit than in the earlier poem. The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, which is deeply expressive of Shelley's thought and aspiration, im-

plies indeed an explicit mystical experience whose rationalization is in terms recognizably Platonistic. Whether the philosophic character of the two poems is due to this experience alone, whether to some emotional development in Shelley, or whether to reading which shaped his thought into Platonic or neo-Platonic forms more definite than before, does not appear; but certainly the mysticism suggested in *Alastor* becomes in a few months more positive in character and its emotional tone no longer desponding but hopeful. It is hard to see wherein the change is due to external circumstance, though an improvement in his physical being might in part account for it. It seems rather that his conversion was intellectual, that he had found in Platonism and neo-Platonism the solvent and reconciler of the various philosophies which had thus far been the themes of his speculation.

The *Hymn* begins with an explicit assertion:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
Floats tho' unseen among us, visiting  
This various world with as inconstant wing  
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower;

This inconstant visitor he identifies in the second stanza as the Spirit of Beauty and asks why its presence is intermittent only. The answer is that the sunlight too is inconstant and "fear and dream and death and birth" cast gloom upon earthly life, and man has scope—

For love and hate, despondency and hope.

No sage or poet has heard the "voice from some sublimer world" which can resolve the uncertainties of existence. "Doubt, chance, and mutability" are the powers which sway human life. It is only the Spirit of Beauty which, like light, or music, or moonlight

Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

Love, and hope, and self-esteem visit man at times but did Intellectual Beauty remain constantly with him he "were immortal and omnipotent." The Spirit of Beauty is the messenger of sympathies in lovers' eyes; it is nourishment to human thought.

Depart not, lest the grave should be,  
Like life and fear, a dark reality!

\*

The qualification or definition of Beauty as intellectual establishes the Platonic origin of the term. Intellectual Beauty is that coexistent

with the True and the Good as the summation of the Absolute, the One who—if it may be thought of as a person, which it properly is not—is in other terminology God, the creative mind, the image of whose thought is this phenomenal world. In auspicious moments we feel this power about us or pervading us. Such is the teaching of neo-Platonic mysticism. Various cults of a mystical character employ a ritual designed to bring to its devotees the mystical rapture which constitutes this sense of unity with God, the One. Seemingly it comes to others in happy moments unheralded. Such is the experience which Shelley recounts in the fifth stanza of his poem. As a boy, he writes, he sought for ghosts, invoking the dead in incantations, but was not heard. And then in the spring-time “when musing deeply on the lot of life”

Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;  
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

The visitation of the Spirit of Beauty came to him, as to Wordsworth, in a moment of meditation, of “wise passiveness.” It was not, apparently, an esthetic emotion in any narrow meaning of the phrase though prompted by an esthetic experience. To the Platonist, the Good and the True are identifiable with the Beautiful, are virtual synonyms for the ineffable perfection of the Divine. It is a moral incentive which the experience supplied the poet. He vowed to dedicate his powers to “thee and thine” and asks “have I not kept the vow?”<sup>7</sup> The “awful Loveliness” which he has perceived he looks to to “free this world from its dark slavery.” Informed by it he is bound “To fear himself, and love all humankind.” The social emphasis which Shelley stresses is characteristic of him. The perception of Intellectual Beauty is the prompting to the socially good life.<sup>8</sup>

In the poem *Mont Blanc*, written during Shelley’s second visit to Switzerland in the summer of 1816, the Platonism is more copious, more elaborately reasoned, than in the *Hymn*. The opening lines establish at once the character of the thought:

The everlasting universe of things  
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,  
Now dark, now glittering, now reflecting gloom,  
Now lending splendor, where from secret springs  
The source of human thought its tribute brings  
Of waters,—....

Experience, the external world of things, is likened to a river, as

life itself in *Alastor* was likened to a river. Diversity and mutability are its characteristics. It "flows through the mind," for it exists only as perceived. It is thought, therefore, thought imposed from without. But it is not received passively, for the "source of human thought," deriving from "secret springs" brings too its "tribute of waters" which lend a splendor to it. By this I understand Shelley to say in the language of Platonism that the mind intuitively inspired by the divine, the "intellectual fountains" of neo-Platonism, glorifies and interprets experience, seeing beyond the phenomenal world the Divine thought which created it. The world of things is but the reflection, the "shadow" of the Divine thought. The stream, the Arve, is then likened to Power, which, springing from its "secret throne," as the river from its glacier source, animates the universe. The "universe of things" which "rolls its rapid waves," is thought which is the expression of Power. The Divine Power is the Divine Mind. There is a seeming assumption that thought and Power are one and that they flow like a river through the mind of the percipient.

The contemplation of this mutable universe, this stream of thought and Power, provokes in the observer a trance of meditation in which he muses on his "own separate fantasy," his own imagination divorced from the scene which it contemplates. With the scene it holds "an unremitting interchange" and the thought passively received and passively responding constitutes "one legion of wild thoughts." It is the term "passively" which gives the conception its peculiar interest. The thought contributed by the observer is seemingly not free, not creative, but derives inevitably from the thing perceived; unless, to return to a previous passage, thought intuitively derived from a Divine source endows the scene with splendor. Shelley, apparently, in this Platonic passage clings still to the concept of Locke and Hume and repeats in different words what he elsewhere phrases thus: "mind does not create." The thought thus passively evoked is both observant of the outer scene and meditative or inward looking, an idea conveyed by the phrase "the still cave of the witch Poesy." The cave in Platonic imagery is the symbol of the mind shut apart from the world of actuality without. It implies isolation, separateness, or, as more precisely here, meditation rather than observation. Within this cave of meditation or Poesy the mind seeks "among the shadows that pass by" the "ghosts of all things that are," which I take to mean that in inner meditation are images of all the external world of things, among them of the river itself. These meditations recalled, the poet looks again outwardly and perceives the river whose image



he had inwardly contemplated: the stream, a thought; its reflection or image, a thought also.

The speculations of the third stanza are even more abstract and tenuous than those thus far considered.

Some say that gleams of a remoter world  
Visit the soul in sleep,—that death is slumber,  
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber  
Of those who wake and live.—I look on high;  
Has some unknown Omnipotence unfurled  
The veil of life and death? or do I lie  
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep  
Spread far around and inaccessibly  
Its circles?

The mood, if not its rationalization, is clear enough. He is describing the sense of unreality, the trance-like state induced by the silence and the mass of mighty peaks. He asks, is this slumber, which is visited by “gleams of a remoter world”? Or is this death, which is also a sleep visited by more thoughts than those which occupy the living? If so, what precisely does he mean by unfurling “the veil of life and death”? The context would seem to imply that in this trance-like state the veil between life and death is withdrawn and that he enters upon the world of death whose thoughts outnumber those of life. But if so, is not the meaning of a veil withdrawn more accurately conveyed by “furled” rather than “unfurled”? Surely he means that in this waking trance he can no longer distinguish between life and death.

The description of the mountain, which follows, is realistic. It stresses the desolation, the ruin, the destructive force evident in the harsh scene before him. Did fire or earthquake create this “desert peopled by the storms alone”?

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue  
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,  
So solemn, so serene, that man may be  
But for such faith with Nature reconciled;  
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal  
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood  
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good,  
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

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Here again I feel the mood to be clearer than its rationalization. Man, in the contemplation of this grandeur, perceives his own littleness; and the fraud and woe of human life becomes so petty, so little worth pursuing, that he is purged of them. So it is with many, the wise and the good, though not with all. Man is reconciled with nature in the solemnity and serenity of his contemplation. But what, then, is the "awful doubt"? Perhaps of his own importance in the scheme of things.

The earth and sea and all within them, man and his works, "all things that move and breathe," alike

Are born and die, revolve, subside, and swell;  
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,  
Remote, serene, and inaccessible.

From the glaciers which "creep like snakes" ruin descends:

... the rocks drawn down  
From yon remotest waste, have overthrown  
The limits of the dead and living world,  
Never to be reclaimed.

Man, his works, and his dwelling place

Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream.

The majestic river, "the breath and blood of distant lands," from its source in the icy caves in the glacier flows forever to the sea. But the mountain endures: "the power is there."

... The secret strength of things,  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!  
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,  
If to the human mind's imaginings  
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

The conclusion of his thought presumably lies in these lines. The contrast drawn is between the mutable world of things and the secret and remote residence of power symbolized in the mountain. This "secret strength of things" governs both thought and the "infinite dome of heaven." It is the enduring force which lies back of seeming, of the visible universe. Does he imply that the universe and the mountain itself exist only as the mind gives them reality, as they live in thought? If this is the meaning, thought is the sole reality of the

universe. It is thought which emanates from the Power that "dwells apart in its tranquillity" and in sharing its thought man identifies himself with the source thereof.

In attempting to rationalize mystical lore, which is always in part emotional and intuitional, there is inevitable loss. A meaning which is felt escapes the precision of a prose definition. Shelley in *Mont Blanc* is expressing much the same thought that Wordsworth expresses in the *Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey*. Both are endeavoring to convey their intuitional understanding of some Power back of the visible universe, some "spirit which rolls through all things." But whereas Wordsworth is soothed and strengthened by these experiences of reality and his doubts and questionings fall from him, Shelley, more philosophically minded, seeks to find the explanation of the experience as well as to record it. It compels him to define for himself the nature of reality and the relation of the mind of man to the Power in which reality has its being. Shelley does in verse what the philosopher seeks to do in prose. For the critic, therefore, to attempt to put into more explicit prose the implications of the thought poetically expressed is but to continue one step further the process which Shelley himself has begun. Shelley in his practice and theory drew no such distinction between poetry and philosophy as many poets and lovers of poetry are wont to make. Shelley's verse divorced of all but its purely emotional content would be infinitely less than it is; for he raises in his poetry the fundamental questions of philosophy. The poetic form, it is true, permits him to avoid too precise an answer. The answer is by implication, is expressed in a symbol, or is left as a question to provoke thought. It may even be that, as in the concluding lines of *Mont Blanc*, Shelley is not yet sure of the answer. The source of Power which resides tranquilly alone may be indifferent to the ruin wrought by natural forces on the world and on man. Or again it may be that man in his moments of deeper perception shares the strength and tranquillity of that Power and can with composure view its manifestations, secure in his final identity with it.

The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc* were written during Shelley's stay in Switzerland in the summer of 1816 whither he and Mary were accompanied by Clare Clairmont, Mary's step-sister. On May 3, immediately preceding their departure Shelley wrote Godwin telling the disappointment of his hopes in raising any considerable sum from the properties to which he was heir. Of the

small amount in prospect he promised Godwin £300 for which he gave a post-obit security. Shelley suggests that Godwin use his influence with a money lender to secure a further loan, but adds, "Perhaps you would dislike to be mistaken for my personal friend, which it would be necessary you should appear, provided you acquiesce in this suggestion." The motives which drive him from England, perhaps never to return, Shelley explains. He does not wish to remain "in a situation where what I esteem a prejudice does not permit me to live on equal terms with my fellow-beings." Of Godwin he writes, "I respect you, I think well of you, better perhaps than of any other person whom England contains; you were the philosopher who first awakened, and who still as a philosopher to a very great degree regulates my understanding. It is unfortunate for me that the part of your character which is least excellent should have been met by my convictions of what was right to do. But I have been too indignant, I have been unjust to you—forgive me; burn those letters which contain the records of my violence, and believe that, however, what you erroneously call fame and honour separate us, I shall always feel towards you as the most affectionate of friends." Godwin responded to this unmerited magnanimity by hounding Shelley further for money, as duly appears in subsequent letters.

The letters written to Peacock descriptive of Shelley's travels in Switzerland give in detail the background which Shelley employed in his poem *Mont Blanc* and Byron in *Manfred*. It was in Switzerland that Shelley met Byron, whom he accompanied on various expeditions. For some reason Shelley does not allude to Byron by name in the letters, perhaps because of the notoriety which Byron had recently attained in the separation from Lady Byron. It is not my purpose to dwell on this early association with Byron nor on the influence of each on the other. More on this theme will be pertinent at a later time. Nor is it essential to dwell on Shelley's vivid description of mountain scenery. The Alps were a revelation to him. He had, he confessed, never realized before what mountains could be. It is more important in a history of Shelley's ideas to note the occasional observations which he passes upon man and government. He bore an unchanged mind under alien skies, and the marvels of Alpine scenery serve often to contrast the misery and servitude of the human beings who dwelt among them.

His experiences abroad made England seem in retrospect relatively a civilized country. He writes (May 15) to Peacock: "You live in a free country, where you may act without restraint, and

possess that which you possess in security; and so long as the name of country and the selfish conceptions it includes shall subsist, England, I am persuaded, is the most free and the most refined.... He will never know what love subsists between that [the country of his birth] and him until absence shall have made its beauty more heart-felt." Should he return no more to England, he writes, her name will be "dear to me for ever." At a later time, when his exile was to endure through life, he wrote in a more embittered tone, but other and more tragic experiences than he had yet endured were in store for him before the final parting. Youth and hope died slowly in him despite the fact that he forever in life "found the truth worse than his visions were." He writes later (July 12): "The appearance of the inhabitants of Evian is more wretched, diseased, and poor, than I ever recollect to have seen. The contrast indeed between the subjects of the King of Sardinia and the citizens of the independent republics of Switzerland, affords a powerful illustration of the blighting mischiefs of despotism, within the space of a few miles." The *Nouvelle Héloïse* which Shelley read for the first time in Switzerland delighted him and lent additional interest to the romantic scenery of Geneva. That the Empress Maria Louisa had visited Meillerie provokes from him this comment: "A Bourbon dared not even to have remembered Rousseau. She owed this power [admission of "the common sentiments of human nature"] to that democracy which her husband's dynasty outraged, and of which it was however, in some sort, the representative among the nations of the earth. This little incident shows at once how unfit and how impossible it is for the ancient system of opinions, or for any power built upon a conspiracy to revive them, permanently to subsist among mankind."

It was on Lake Geneva that Shelley and Byron encountered the storm in which their boat nearly foundered. Shelley, it is recorded in Moore's *Life of Byron*, refused Byron's aid, "and seating himself quietly upon a locker, and grasping the rings at each end firmly in his hands, declared his determination to go down in that position." Shelley in telling the experience in a letter to Peacock (July 12) writes: "I felt in this near prospect of death a mixture of sensations, among which terror entered, though but subordinately. My feelings would have been less painful had I been alone; but I knew that my companion would have attempted to save me, and I was overcome with humiliation, when I thought that his life might have been risked to preserve mine." The Castle of Chillon which Shelley and Byron visited inspired Byron to one of his best poems. Shelley's response

to this monument of tyranny is no less characteristic: "... this dungeon was the receptacle of those who shook, or who denied the system of idolatry, from the effects of which mankind is even now slowly emerging. Close to this long and lofty dungeon was a narrow cell, and beyond it one larger and far more lofty and dark, supported upon two unornamented arches. Across one of these arches was a beam, now black and rotten, on which prisoners were hung in secret. I never saw a monument more terrible of that cold and inhuman tyranny, which it had been the delight of man to exercise over man. It was indeed one of those many tremendous fulfilments which render the 'perniciēs humani generis' of the great Tacitus so solemn and irrefragable a prophecy."

The little chapel celebrated in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* was no more than a heap of stones. "Whilst we were execrating the author of this brutal folly, our guide informed us that the land belonged to the convent of St. Bernard, and that this outrage had been committed by their orders. I knew before, that if avarice could harden the hearts of men, a system of prescriptive religion has an influence far more inimical to natural sensibility. I know that an isolated man is sometimes restrained by shame from outraging the venerable feelings arising out of the memory of genius, which once made nature even lovelier than itself; but associated man holds it as the very sacrament of his union to forswear all delicacy, all benevolence, all remorse; all that is true, or tender, or sublime." For one not yet twenty-four Shelley had gone far on the road of disillusionment and misanthropy. The effort to which he devoted his life, to improve the human lot, presumes only in his boyish attempts an ignorance of men. He learned reality far more rapidly than most and very early freed himself from sentimentality and false illusions. It is not a fact sufficiently remarked. The common illusions as to Shelley's character and opinions spring from the failure to follow Shelley's mental history chronologically. The boy and the man are in the usual critical commentary confused, to the misunderstanding of both. Beyond this stupidity lies, of course, another motive. Men in the mass, like individuals, shut their eyes and ears to criticism of themselves: *Gulliver's Travels* is taken as a child's book of fairy tales. Man wishes to regard himself as a noble creature despite the all but unanimous evidence to the contrary. The Shelley that is admired is not the Shelley that depicted human nature and human society as they are, but the Shelley that wrote beautiful nature lyrics. It is always safe for a poet to write rhapsodically of the beauties of nature. Most men will secretly deem him a fool but innocuous.

On July 17 he writes, again to Peacock, of a proposed journey down the great rivers of Europe, the Danube, the Po, the Rhone, and the Garonne. Rivers, he observes, are unlike roads, "the work of the hands of man; they imitate mind, which wanders at will over pathless deserts, and flows through nature's loveliest recesses, which are inaccessible to anything besides." Again, we must remark his use, and in prose, of one of his favorite images, that of the stream as a symbol of life or of mind. It is in tracing from instance to instance Shelley's adoption of this and other symbols that the reader becomes habituated to his thought processes and so possessed of a key to his more esoteric works. The letters cast an invaluable light on Shelley's mental development, incomplete as they are for certain crucial periods of his life. They offer hints which, together with his neglected prose, make his poetry intelligible. It is in the letters and prose that the genuineness of Shelley's knowledge of science is best perceived, in the notes to *Queen Mab* as an early instance, and in such descriptions as he writes to Peacock of the Swiss glaciers. The poem *Mont Blanc* with its realistic background of impersonal ruin, of ruthless desolation emanating from Power aloof from man, has its philosophic basis partly in the science of the day. Shelley writes: "I will not pursue Buffon's sublime but gloomy theory—that this globe which we inhabit will, at some future period, be changed into a mass of frost by the encroachments of the polar ice, and of that produced on the most elevated points of the earth. Do you, who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost, so sculptured in this their terrible magnificence by the adamantine hand of necessity, and that he casts around him, as the first essays of his final usurpation, avalanches, torrents, rocks, and thunders, and above all these deadly glaciers, at once the proof and symbols of his reign;—add to this, the degradation of the human species—who, in these regions, are half deformed or idiotic, and most of whom are deprived of anything that can excite interest or admiration. This is part of the subject more mournful and less sublime; but such as neither the poet nor the philosopher should disdain to regard."

The theme is the ever-recurrent one, the problem of evil. In *Queen Mab* he had found in the Spirit of Nature, the good, the actuating principle of a universe whose evil was due to false customs and traditional institutions and therefore remediable. In the contemplation of Mont Blanc and its glaciers so facile an ascription of beneficence to the Spirit of Nature was impossible to a realistic mind. Power was

there, but Power aloof from and seemingly indifferent to man. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" It was not apparent that Power, Ahriman perhaps, was mindful of man. Yet this destructive force in Nature, it is to be noted, is no longer thought, as in *Queen Mab*, to be impersonal Necessity expressing itself in unalterable law. It has become a spirit, a spirit which, in his waking trance, he is sensible of but which he cannot conceive, in its relation to animate things, to trees, insects, and to man himself, as beneficent. It seems at best, if not actively malignant, indifferent and remote. Only in the concluding lines of the poem does he express, ambiguously, a doubt as to the reality of this power as evil. He seems to ask, may not this Power, seemingly evil in its manifestations, be itself only the product of thought and have no reality if we are able to conceive of it as vacancy. If we share in thought and thought "is the measure of the universe," the implication would be that the evil forces of the world are perhaps man's own creation. The problem in the poem's expression of it is not so explicitly put. It is, at best, implicit. Only as we regard Shelley's subsequent philosophy, *Prometheus* notably, which wrestles with this very problem, do we justifiably read into *Mont Blanc* latent implications of which Shelley is only half aware. Emotionally Shelley is confronted with reconciling the Spirit of things either with benevolence or with omnipotence. Philosophically the problem has not yet emerged into the clear light of rationalization.

There is yet one further incident of Shelley's Swiss sojourn to be noted for its possible significance in relation to his beliefs. In his *Journal* he records for August 18 the visit to Byron of "Apollo's Sexton," Monk Lewis. The talk was naturally of ghosts, and inspired by Lewis' tales of the supernatural, Shelley, Byron, and Mary Shelley got the notion of writing ghost stories; only one of them, Mary Shelley, persisted in the attempt, producing the well-known novel, *Frankenstein*. It is Shelley's comment on the visit which is interesting as suggesting his openmindedness with regard to the occult: "We talk of Ghosts. Neither Lord Byron nor M. G. L. seem to believe in them; and they both agree, in the very face of reason, that none could believe in ghosts without believing in God. I do not think that all the persons who profess to discredit these visitations, really discredit them; or, if they do in the daylight, are not admonished, by the approach of loneliness and midnight, to think more respectfully of the world of shadows." Shelley apparently kept an open mind on the subject, neither believing nor disbelieving, despite the failure



of his youthful attempts by incantation and church-yard vigils to encounter a ghost and learn from it the secret of the dead. The scientific mind can neither deny nor affirm the existence of ghosts.

Returning to England by way of France, the Shelleys went sight-seeing at Versailles where they were impressed by the magnificence of the palace, though Shelley was somewhat critical of the architecture and the taste displayed in the decorations. The apartments, Shelley observed in the *Journal*, September 3, "are more magnificent than those of Fontainebleau. They are lined with marble of various colors, whose pedestals and capitals are gilt, and the ceiling is richly gilt with compartments of painting. The arrangement of these materials has in them, it is true, something effeminate and royal. Could a Grecian architect have commanded all the labour and money which was expended in Versailles, he would have produced a fabric which the whole world has never equalled." A book shown him by the librarian of the library of Louis XVI provoked in Shelley a characteristic reaction: "It was a book of paintings, representing a tournament at the Court of Louis XIV; and it seemed that the present desolation of France, the fury of the injured people, and all the horrors to which they abandoned themselves, stung by their long sufferings, flowed naturally enough from expenditures so immense, as must have been demanded by the magnificence of this tournament. The vacant rooms of this palace imaged well the hollow show of monarchy."

Shelley bore with him to England the manuscript of the third Canto of *Childe Harold* whose poetic superiority to its predecessors can partly be credited to him. The Wordsworthian influence apparent in it was the result of Shelley's missionary zeal. Shelley read the proofs of the poem and fulfilled other errands in his characteristic and friendly way. Byron, like everyone else, imposed on him, though Byron was happily above the need of money. Godwin sufficed for any number of lesser leeches and Shelley turned over to him whatever money—never enough—he could spare from his own meagre necessities. Godwin was insatiable, quite willing, it is evident, to commit Shelley to any engagement, even to jeopardizing his financial future, provided his own needs were met. It is some extenuation of Godwin's rapacity that he was up to his ears in debt and was in turn hounded by others. Shelley's replies to Godwin are uniformly patient and courteous. But they are also firm and in course of time became firmer. He would submit to imposition thus far and no farther. Godwin did much to educate him in the knowledge of human nature and helped develop in him that resolution which it is surprising to observe in

one so sensitive, sympathetic, and kindly as Shelley, with very few exceptions, proved himself to be.

The last month of 1816 and the year 1817 were destined to bring Shelley more tragic experience than happiness, being thus in no way unlike other years of his adult, or even adolescent life. One of the bright spots was the friendship formed with Hunt, who had briefly but favorably reported on *Alastor* in the *Examiner* of December 1. An interchange of letters followed and Shelley sent Hunt the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, which was published in the *Examiner*, January 19, 1817. Shelley's letter of December 8 refers in part to the proposed publication over his own name rather than a pen name: "The poem was composed under the influence of feelings which agitated me even to tears, so that I think it deserves a better fate than the being linked with so stigmatized and unpopular a name (so far as it is known) as mine. You will say that it is not thus, that I am morbidly sensitive to what I esteem the injustice of neglect—but I do not say that I am unjustly neglected, the oblivion which overtook my little attempt of 'Alastor' I am ready to acknowledge was sufficiently merited in *itself*; but then it was not accorded in the correct proportion considering the success of the most contemptible drivellings. I am undeceived in the belief that I have powers deeply to interest, or substantially to improve, mankind.... I do not seek to conceal from myself, that I am an outcast from human society; my name is execrated by all who understand its entire import—by those very beings whose happiness I ardently desire. I am an object of compassion to a few more benevolent than the rest, all else abhor and avoid me. With you, and perhaps some others (though in a less degree I fear) my gentleness and sincerity find favour, because they are themselves gentle and sincere: they believe in self devotion and generosity, because they are themselves generous and self devoted. Perhaps I should have shrunk from persisting in the task which I had undertaken in early life, of opposing myself in these evil times and among these evil tongues, to what I esteem misery and vice; if I must have lived in the solitude of the heart. Fortunately my domestic circle incloses that within it which compensates for the loss."

On December 15 Shelley heard of Harriet's suicide, her body having been recovered from the Serpentine on December 10. For some months she had been separated from her family, having been driven from her home, it is supposed, by her sister Eliza whom Shelley so hated. In his letter to Mary, December 15, Shelley, it is apparent, is already apprehensive that a Chancery suit may be necessary to re-

cover his children, Ianthe and Charles: "If they [the Westbrooks] should dare to bring it before Chancery, a scene of such fearful horror would be unfolded as would cover them with scorn and shame." On December 30 he writes to Clare Clairmont of his marriage celebrated that day with Mary: "The ceremony, so magical in its effects, was undergone this morning at St. Mildred's Church in the City. Mrs. G. and G. were both present, and appeared to feel no little satisfaction. Indeed Godwin throughout has shown the most polished and cautious attentions to me and Mary. He seems to think no kindness too great in compensation for what has passed. I confess I am not entirely deceived by this, though I cannot make my vanity wholly insensible to certain attentions paid in a manner studiously flattering. Mrs. G. presents herself to me in her real attributes of affectation, prejudice and heartless pride. Towards her, I confess I never feel an emotion of anything but antipathy. Her sweet daughter is very dear to me." The latter emotion Mary had ceased to share, suspecting that Clare Clairmont whom Shelley befriended then and later, had designs on him. For a man whose emotions were singularly simple and direct, the passions which involved everyone around him and of which he was himself, in some cases, the center, could have been but one more enigma in a world largely incomprehensible. Godwin's conduct was, of course, by this time clear enough. That avaricious bourgeois, his daughter having been made an honest woman, forgave all and welcomed his new son-in-law, who had done the right thing, to the paternal bosom. It seemed not improbable that the new member of the family would do better by it financially than before. Harriet's death had its compensations. The money which Shelley had liberally given her would come in handy to an elderly and impoverished philosopher. There was also Charles Clairmont, Clare's good-for-nothing brother. Shelley wrote Clare (December 30) of sending him £20.

Shelley's expectation that the Westbrooks would be defeated in their purpose to retain his children was unwarranted. Shelley was denied their custody on the ground of his immoral principles as evidenced by *Queen Mab* and the children were ultimately put in the care of a Dr. and Mrs. Hume to be conventionally reared. The Westbrooks' motives it is not hard to guess: Eliza's hatred of Shelley and desire to revenge herself upon him; also the financial motive, for the boy Charles, had he lived, would have inherited the Shelley estates. The judgment of Lord Eldon was not given until March 27, 1817. Meanwhile there were other troubles. Clare Clairmont on Janu-

ary 12 gave birth to a daughter whose father was Byron. Clare and her child were in subsequent years to be an additional burden upon Shelley, at first financial, and subsequently, in his negotiations with Byron for the care of the child, emotional. The Hunts, too, whose "hugger-mugger economy" in Carlyle's phrase was forever hopeless, imposed on Shelley thenceforth, though making more return in love and understanding than any other of Shelley's pensioners. It is not recorded that Shelley begrudged the money he gave them or thought it other than a privilege to aid a man who met the supreme test of character, one who stuck to his principles and willingly went to gaol for them. It is not my purpose in this book, which is the history of Shelley's ideas, to dwell unduly on outward circumstance. Yet undoubtedly all Shelley's experiences of treachery and hatred, of love and faith and ingratitude, had their influences on his thought. In the philosophy of life at which he ultimately arrived he recognizes in a world chiefly evil the existence of idealism and love. It is the contemplation of these which gives Prometheus courage to endure the tortures of Jupiter and in the end to triumph over him.

The year 1817, marked by these misfortunes and their drain upon his energy, was one in which Shelley suffered greatly from ill-health. It is probable that the diagnoses of the doctors were wrong and that he did not suffer from incipient consumption as he thought. But he was undoubtedly ill, living, I suspect, always at too high an intellectual and emotional pitch. He thought he had not long to live and during the summer wrote *The Revolt of Islam* as a final testament of his faith, a last despairing effort to inoculate the world with his ideas. But before examining in detail this important work it is necessary to consider two short prose pamphlets whose publication precedes that of the poem.

*A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* was published early in 1817, presumably in March. It is a short pamphlet which proposes that the question of Parliamentary reform be put to a plebiscite to determine "whether the people ought to legislate for themselves, or be governed by laws and impoverished by taxes originating in the edicts of an assembly which represents somewhat less than a thousandth part of the entire community. I think they ought not to be so taxed and governed. An hospital for lunatics is the only theatre where we can conceive so mournful a comedy to be exhibited as this mighty nation now exhibits: a single person bullying and swindling a thousand of his comrades out of all they possessed in the world, and then trampling and spitting upon them, though he were the most

contemptible and degraded of mankind, and they had strength in their arms and courage in their hearts. Such a parable realized in political society is a spectacle worthy of the utmost indignation and abhorrence." Parliament exercises its prerogatives "in contempt of the People and it is in strict consistency with the laws of human nature that it should have been exercised for the People's misery and ruin. Those whom they despise, men instinctively seek to render slavish and wretched, that their scorn may be secure. It is the object of the Reformers to restore the People to a sovereignty thus held in their contempt."

The condition of the people, he goes on to say, is servile but "servitude is sometimes voluntary." The question then remains to determine accurately whether the people choose to be enslaved or would prefer freedom. To this end Shelley proposes that a meeting of the friends of Reform be held in London, that the population of Great Britain and Ireland be divided into three hundred districts and a Declaration be circulated in each demanding a genuinely representative Parliament. If a majority supports such a demand it should be the duty of the friends of reform to press for its realization; if a minority only, the Reformers should abide peaceably by the decision and strive to alter it only by incessant petition. To the expenses of such a plebiscite Shelley offers £100, a tenth of his income, believing that many others will do the same. He urges the various Reformers to put aside their differences as to detail until it is ascertained whether any Reform is desired by the People. The question of Annual or Triennial Parliaments is one of the differences now debated. Shelley prefers the Annual Parliament because "it would familiarize men with liberty by disciplining them to an habitual acquaintance with its forms." As to Universal Suffrage, Shelley regards it "in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling," as "a measure fraught with peril." He believes voters should be those who pay "a certain small sum in *direct taxes*," for "the consequences of the immediate extension of the elective franchise to every male adult, would be to place power in the hands of men who have been rendered brutal and torpid and ferocious by ages of slavery." He accepts Major Cartwright's arguments as unanswerable that "abstractedly it is the right of every human being to have a share in the government." But he agrees with Paine that it is unreasonable to "abolish the regal and the aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, shall have arrived at the maturity which can disregard these symbols of its childhood."

Brief though it is, the pamphlet affords an excellent glimpse of Shelley's political sagacity and sanity. Shelley has not renounced his early radicalism but he has no illusions as to the immediacy of any social Utopia. Men in the mass have been debased by political institutions. Their reformation will then be a slow process. He wishes to escape the destruction incident to revolution and the leadership of the demagogue. Clearly his hope is for the gradual emancipation of men until they are fit to share in the government of a genuine democracy. Abstractedly all men are free and equal but Shelley knows that in reality they are not so. They are in their political childhood and must, as he says, pass "through many gradations of improvement" before they achieve maturity. His immediate goal then is the one defended by Paine, a republican form of government. This is one of the gradations to the Utopian ideal which he elsewhere depicts, that of anarchism, wherein men act altruistically without the coercion of law. Shelley was in his twenty-fifth year when he wrote the *Proposal*. The years subsequent to *Queen Mab* had, it is evident, taught him much. He had become disillusioned but neither cynical nor inert.]

*An Address to the People on The Death of the Princess Charlotte* was written and published in November, 1817, its motto an adaptation of Paine's famous metaphor anent Burke's lament upon the death of Marie Antoinette: "We pity the plumage, but forget the Dying Bird."<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet of eleven paragraphs is, in my belief, comparable to *A Defence of Poetry* in the maturity of its thought, the eloquence of its style, and its emotional power. In tracing the history of Shelley's thought and its expression in prose and verse one is often struck by the fortuitous character of the fame which attaches to this and that piece of work whereas another which seems equally good is ignored. Or is it the result of chance that the brief pamphlet on the Princess Charlotte is ignored? In it is inimitably portrayed the passionate sincerity of Shelley the social rebel who felt the pain of the world, who hated cruelty and tyranny, and who mourned the death of liberty. This is a Shelley whom many wish to ignore, choosing to think of him only as the lyric poet who writes exquisitely of love and the beauties of nature. Those who find in literature only an anodyne, an escape from reality, had best not read the elegy on the Princess Charlotte and upon the three poor wretches executed at the same time for treason, being incited thereto by misery and oppression and the devilish activities of *agents provocateurs* set on by a government wholly hard and unscrupulous.

The death of the Princess Charlotte in childbed, he observes, is but one instance in thousands. "How many women die, in childbed and leave their families of motherless children and their husbands to live on blighted by the remembrance of that heavy loss? How many women of active and energetic virtues... have died, and have been deplored with bitterness, which is too deep for words? Some have perished in penury or shame, and their orphan baby has survived, a prey to the scorn and neglect of strangers. Men have watched by the bedside of their expiring wives, and have gone mad when the hideous death-rattle was heard within the throat, regardless of the rosy child sleeping in the lap of the unobservant nurse... All this has been and is. You walk with a merry heart through the streets of this great city, and think not that such are the scenes acting all around you. You do not number in your thoughts the mothers who die in childbed. It is the most horrible of ruins:—In sickness, in old age, in battle, death comes as to his own home; but in the season of joy and hope, when life should succeed to life, and the assembled family expects one more, the youngest and the best beloved, that the wife, the mother—she for whom each member of the family was so dear to one another, should die!—Yet thousands of the poorest poor, whose misery is aggravated by what cannot be spoken now, suffer this. And have they no affections? Do not their hearts beat in their bosoms, and the tears gush from their eyes? Are they not human flesh and blood? Yet none weep for them—none mourn for them—none when their coffins are carried to the grave (if indeed the parish furnishes a coffin for all) turn aside and moralize upon the sadness they have left behind."

"The Athenians," Shelley observes, "did well to celebrate, with public mourning, the death of those who had guided the republic with their valour and their understanding, or illustrated it with their genius. Men do well to mourn for the dead; it proves that we love something beside ourselves... To lament for those who have benefitted the state, is a habit of piety yet more favourable to the cultivation of our best affections. When Milton died it had been well that the universal English nation had been clothed in solemn black, and that the muffled bells had tolled from town to town. The French nation should have enjoined a public mourning at the deaths of Rousseau and Voltaire... There should be public mourning when those events take place which make all good men mourn in their hearts,—the rule of foreign or domestic tyrants, the abuse of public faith, the wresting of old and venerable laws to the murder of the

innocent. . . . When the French Republic was extinguished, the world ought to have mourned." Such public expressions of grief should be reserved to great men and to great events. The Princess whom the nation mourns was no more than an amiable and interesting lady. "She was born a Princess; and those who are destined to rule mankind are dispensed with acquiring that wisdom and that experience which is necessary even to rule themselves. . . . She had accomplished nothing, and aspired to nothing, and could understand nothing respecting those great political questions which involve the happiness of those over whom she was destined to rule. Yet this should not be said in blame, but in compassion: let us speak no evil of the dead. Such is the misery, such the impotence of royalty.—Princes are prevented from the cradle from becoming any thing which may deserve that greatest of all rewards next to a good conscience, public admiration and regret."

Having thus paid his respects to Princes, Shelley turns to the execution of Brandreth, Ludlam, and Turner. "These men were shut up in a horrible dungeon, for many months, with the fear of a hideous death and of everlasting hell thrust before their eyes; and at last were brought to the scaffold and hung. They too had domestic affections, and were remarkable for the exercise of private virtues. . . . They had sons, and brothers, and sisters, and fathers, who loved them, it should seem, more than the Princess Charlotte could be loved by those whom the regulations of her rank had held in perpetual estrangement from her. . . . But what must have been the long and various agony of their kindred may be inferred from Edward Turner, who, when he saw his brother dragged along upon the hurdle, shrieked horribly and fell in a fit. . . . They listened to the maddening shriek which burst from the multitude: they heard the rush of ten thousand terror-stricken feet, the groans and the hootings which told them that the mangled and distorted head was then lifted into the air. . . . Nothing is more horrible than that man should for any cause shed the life of man. For all other calamities there is a remedy or a consolation. When that Power through which we live ceases to maintain the life which it has conferred, then is grief and agony, and the burthen which must be borne: such sorrow improves the heart. But when man sheds the blood of man, revenge, and hatred, and a long train of executions, and assassinations, and proscriptions, is perpetuated to remotest time."

The unfortunate men who were executed, Shelley declares, were but "instruments of evil, not so guilty as the hands that wielded them, but fit to inspire caution. But their death, by hanging and beheading,



and the circumstances of which it is the characteristic and the consequence, constitute a calamity such as the English nation ought to mourn with an unassuageable grief." Until the time of the American Revolution there was in England some small check on tyranny. England was until then, "perhaps the freest and most glorious nation subsisting on the surface of the earth." But the government, in the hands of aristocrats, improved upon the method of creating the public debt, financed the war with France by that method, and laid a vast debt upon the people of England. "The effect of this debt is to produce such an unequal distribution of the means of living, as saps the foundation of social union and civilized life. It creates a double aristocracy, instead of one which was sufficiently burthensome before, and gives twice as many people the liberty of living in luxury and idleness, on the produce of the industrious and the poor. And it does not give them this because they are more wise and meritorious than the rest, or because their leisure is spent in schemes of public good, or in those exercises of the intellect and the imagination, whose creations enoble or adorn a country. They are not like the old aristocracy men of pride and honor, *sans peur et sans tache*, but petty piddling slaves who have gained a right to the title of public creditors, either by gambling in the funds, or by subserviency to government, or some other villainous trade. They are not the 'Corinthian capital of polished society,' but the petty and creeping weeds which deface the rich tracery of its sculpture. The effect of this system is, that the day laborer gains no more now by working sixteen hours a day than he gained before by working eight."

It is the burden of the national debt superimposed on the normal expenses of government which thus crushes the humble worker. "Many and various are the mischiefs flowing from oppression, but this is the representative of them all; namely, that one man is forced to labor for another in a degree not only not necessary to the support of the subsisting distinctions among mankind, but so as by the excess of the injustice to endanger the very foundations of all that is valuable in social order, and to provoke that anarchy which is at once the enemy of freedom, and the child and the chastiser of misrule." Against such conditions there were inevitable protest and revolt especially among the manufacturing districts of England where double tyranny prevailed, that of the old aristocracy and that of the new factory owner. "The manufacturers, the helots of our luxury, are left by this system famished, without affections, without health, without leisure or opportunity for such instruction as might counteract those habits

of turbulence and dissipation, produced by the precariousness and insecurity of poverty. Here was a ready field for any adventurer who should wish for whatever purpose to incite a few ignorant men to acts of illegal outrage. So soon as it was plainly seen that the demands of the people for a free representation must be conceded if some intimidation and prejudice were not conjured up, a conspiracy of the most horrible atrocity was laid in train. . . . It is impossible to know how numerous or how active they [agents] have been, or by what false hopes they are yet inflaming the untutored multitude to put their necks under the axe and into the halter.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Spies were sent among the people when the demand grew for parliamentary reform. “These were selected from the most worthless and infamous of mankind, and dispersed among the multitude of famished and illiterate labourers. It was their business if they found no discontent to create it. It was their business to find victims, no matter whether right or wrong. It was their business to produce upon the public an impression, that if any attempt to attain national freedom, or to diminish the burthens of debt and taxation under which we groan, were successful, the starving multitude would rush in, and confound all orders and distinctions, and institutions and laws, in common ruin. The inference with which they were required to arm the ministers was, that despotic power ought to be eternal. To produce this salutary impression, they betrayed some innocent and unsuspecting rustics into a crime whose penalty is a hideous death. A few hungry and ignorant manufacturers seduced by the splendid promises of these remorseless blood-conspirators, collected together in what is called rebellion against the state. All was prepared, and the eighteen dragoons assembled in readiness, no doubt, conducted their astonished victims to that dungeon which they left only to be mangled by the executioner’s hand. . . . The public voice was overpowered by the timid and the selfish, who threw the weight of fear into the scale of public opinion, and parliament confided anew to the executive government those extraordinary powers which may never be laid down . . . or which the regularly constituted assembly of the nation must wrest out of their hands. Our alternatives are a despotism, a revolution, or reform.”’<sup>2</sup>

One of the executed, Brandreth, when brought to the scaffold cried out that the informer and government agent, Oliver, had “*Brought him to this . . . but for Oliver he would not have been there.*” Turner, another of those executed, “exclaimed loudly and distinctly, *while the executioner was putting the rope around his*

*neck*, 'THIS IS ALL OLIVER AND THE GOVERNMENT.'” This conspiracy and these horrors were committed at the instigation of a government which trampled upon all human rights and liberties. “Mourn then People of England. Clothe yourselves in solemn black. Let the bells be tolled.... Spare no symbol of universal grief. Weep—mourn—lament. Fill the great City—fill the boundless fields, with lamentation and the echo of groans. A beautiful Princess is dead:—she who should have been the Queen of her beloved nation and whose posterity should have ruled it for ever.... She was amiable and would have become wise, but... in the flower of youth the despoiler came. LIBERTY is dead.... *Man* has murdered Liberty, and whilst the life was ebbing from its wound, there descended on the hearts of every human [being] the sympathy of an universal blast and curse. Fetters heavier than iron weigh upon us, because they bind our souls. We move about in a dungeon more pestilential than damp and narrow walls, because the earth is its floor and the heavens are its roof. Let us follow the corpse of British Liberty slowly and reverentially to its tomb: and if some glorious Phantom should appear, and make its throne of broken swords and sceptres and royal crowns trampled in the dust, let us say that the Spirit of Liberty has arisen from its grave and left all that was gross and mortal there, and kneel down and worship it as our Queen.”<sup>i</sup>

## CHAPTER X

### *The Revolt of Islam*



*Laon and Cythna*, later entitled *The Revolt of Islam*, was written in the summer of 1817 and was completed on September 23 of that year. In a letter of October 13 to an unidentified publisher Shelley explains the form and purpose of the poem of which he submits the first canto as a specimen, explaining: "The whole poem, with the exception of the first canto and part of the last, is a more human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference. The first canto is indeed in some measure a distinct poem, though very necessary to the wholeness of the work. I say this because if it were all written in the manner of the first canto, I could not expect that it would be interesting to any great number of People. I have attempted in the progress of the work to speak to the common elementary emotions of the human heart, so that though it is the story of violence and revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship and love and natural affections. The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is in fact a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think) the modern philosophy, and contending with antient notions and the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is a revolution of this kind that is the *beau ideal*, as it were, of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius and not out of general knowledge."

A letter to Charles Ollier, the publisher, on December 11, 1817, intimates the difficulties which led to the revision of *Laon and Cythna* and its subsequent publication under the title of *The Revolt of Islam*. When the poem was in print Ollier read it and became alarmed at a number of passages, fearing government prosecution. He refused to go on with it though three copies had been issued, one by ill luck going to the *Quarterly Review* which made it the theme of an abusive attack. Shelley urged Ollier to have courage and go on: "I beseech you to reconsider the matter, for your sake no less than for my own. Assume the high and secure ground of courage. The people who

visit your shop, and the wretched bigot who gave his worthless custom to some other bookseller, are not the public. The public respect talent; and a large portion of them are already undeceived with regard to the prejudices which my book attacks. You would lose some customers, but you would gain others. . . . I don't believe that, if the book was quietly and regularly published, the Government would touch anything of a character so refined, and so remote from the conceptions of the vulgar. . . . You might bring the arm of the law down on us by flinching now. Directly these scoundrels see that people are afraid of them, they seize upon them and hold them up to mankind as criminals already convicted by their own fears. You lay yourself prostrate, and they trample on you." Ollier proved unyielding, however, and Shelley, protesting to the end, was made by his friends to consent to certain omissions and alterations. Shelley's chief offense was making Cythna the sister-wife of Laon, a relationship expressive of the Platonic conception of affinities, the two parts, masculine and feminine, of the integrated soul. The vulgar would, his friends felt, and no doubt rightly, see in this relationship no more than a gross justification of incest, another proof of his immorality. Shelley had realistic experience of human betrayals of friendship and his pamphlet on the death of the Princess Charlotte reveals surely a realistic grasp of political facts. Yet it is not evident that he ever wholly plumbed the vulgarity of the mass of mankind and their pathological preoccupation with sex.

✓ Mrs. Shelley supplies some interesting information about the composition of the poem and its theme: "He chose for his hero a youth nourished in dreams of liberty, some of whose actions are in direct opposition to the opinions of the world, but who is animated throughout by an ardent love of virtue, and resolution to confer the boons of political and intellectual freedom on his fellow-creatures. . . . There exists in this poem a memorial of a friend of his youth. The character of the old man who liberates Laon from his tower-prison, and tends on him in sickness, is founded on that of Doctor Lind, who, when Shelley was at Eton, had often stood by to befriend and support him, and whose name he never mentioned without love and veneration." Her remarks upon Marlow, where the poem was written, have also interest as showing the very real character of Shelley's concern for the poor and the unfortunate, instances of which survive in a number of anecdotes. He was never at any time in his life an "unsocial socialist." His hatred of the needless ills and miseries of human society was not based wholly on Voltaire, Godwin, and their like, but also

upon his own knowledge of particular instances of human suffering, to whose relief he devoted a large share of his income. Mrs. Shelley writes: "Marlow was inhabited (I hope it is altered now) by a very poor population. The women are lacemakers, and lose their health by sedentary labor, for which they were very ill paid. The poor-laws ground to the dust not only the paupers, but those who had risen just above that state, and were obliged to pay poor-rates. The changes produced by peace following a long war, and a bad harvest, brought with them the most heart-rending evils to the poor. Shelley afforded what alleviation he could. In the winter while bringing out his poem, he had a severe attack of ophthalmia, caught while visiting the poor cottages. I mention these things,—for this minute and active sympathy with his fellow-creatures gives a thousand-fold interest to his speculations, and stamps with reality his pleadings for the human race."

The general theme of the poem was defined in the letter already quoted to the unidentified publisher. A letter to Godwin, December 11, 1817, is further enlightening: "The poem was produced by a series of thoughts which filled my mind with unbounded and sustained enthusiasm. I felt the precariousness of my life, and I engaged in this task, resolved to leave some record of myself. Much of what the volume contains was written with the same feeling, as real, though not so prophetic, as the communications of a dying man. I never presumed indeed to consider it anything approaching to faultless; but when I consider contemporary productions of the same apparent pretensions, I own I was filled with confidence. I felt that it was in many respects a genuine picture of my own mind. I felt that the sentiments were true, not assumed. And in this have I long believed that my power consists; in sympathy and that part of the imagination which relates to sentiment and contemplation. I am formed, if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole. Of course, I believe these faculties, which perhaps comprehend all that is sublime in man, to exist very imperfectly in my own mind."

| If to Mrs. Shelley's comment and the excerpts from Shelley's letters be added Shelley's preface to the poem, we have a fuller knowledge of his purpose and meaning in *The Revolt of Islam* than of perhaps any other of his poems except *Queen Mab*. The knowledge, to be sure, largely reinforces the ideas explicit in the poem itself rather than

throwing light upon his metaphysics or his poetical employment of symbols. The poem is purposive and its themes are social. It expresses his passionate desire to reform the world and improve the lot of suffering humanity. As such it contains little that is recondite, though it is important as showing the progress in the development of his ideas from their less mature expression in *Queen Mab*. Ideas of a profounder character are, however, suggested, and it is these upon which the historian of Shelley's mind will dwell, for they are the germs of his later and more important poems.

✓ In his Preface to the *Revolt of Islam* Shelley explains that it is an experiment to test the character of the age, to determine "how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live." He aspires to kindle within the bosoms of his readers "a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind." The poem, he says, "is narrative, not didactic," seeking to move the reader to the emulation of a virtuous character who strives to awaken a nation from slavery, to "the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission." He will paint the consequences of tyranny and "the transient nature of ignorance and error and the eternity of genius and virtue."

He proceeds then to a discussion of the consequences of the French Revolution. "The panic which . . . seized upon all classes of men during the excesses consequent upon the French Revolution, is gradually giving place to sanity." Because men suddenly freed from centuries of tyranny showed themselves incapable of acting as men should is no reason for mankind to "consign themselves to a lifeless inheritance of ignorance and misery." It was inevitable that they should so act. "Methinks those who now live have survived an age of despair." The Revolution grew from "a defect of correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions." That it did not prove prosperous is evidence of the evils which it overthrew. "Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent?" Such a result is to be attained only after generations of earnest effort. But in many liberal-minded people the failure of the Revolution produced gloom and misanthropy which "have tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds

from which it flows. Metaphysics, and inquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change." And in a footnote he calls attention to the concession made by Malthus in the later editions of his works to "an indefinite dominion to moral restraint over the principle of population. This concession answers all the inferences from his doctrine unfavorable to human improvement, and reduces the *Essay on Population* to a commentary illustrative of the unanswerableness of *Political Justice*."

In stating his qualifications for writing so pretentious a poem there is in Shelley's words a note of defiance, as though he could foresee the abusive criticism which it was to provoke. His attitude is one mingled of pride and humility. He is aware of his powers, powers such that critics should consider his works with the attention that they deserved; he knows, too, that in endeavoring to be original he challenges comparison with others: "I do not presume to enter into competition with our great contemporary poets. Yet I am unwilling to tread in the footsteps of any who have preceded me." He then discusses the poetical character of an age which inevitably marks every original author in it, whether great or small. "In this view of things, Ford can no more be called the imitator of Shakespeare than Shakespeare the imitator of Ford. There were perhaps few other points of resemblance between these two men than that which the universal and inevitable influence of their age produced. And this is an influence which neither the meanest scribbler nor the sublimest genius of any era can escape; and which I have not attempted to escape." He has, he says, "written fearlessly. It is the misfortune of this age that its writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with the fear of Reviews before their eyes. This system of criticism sprang up in that torpid interval when poetry was not. Poetry and the art which professes to regulate and limit its powers cannot subsist together. . . . I have sought therefore to write, as I believe that Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton wrote, with an utter disregard of anonymous censure. . . . I cannot conceive that Lucretius, when he meditated that poem whose doctrines are yet the basis of our metaphysical knowledge and whose eloquence has been the wonder of mankind, wrote in awe of such censure as the hired sophists of the



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impure and superstitious noblemen of Rome might affix to what he should produce."

There is one further brief passage from the Preface which should be cited, informative as it is of Shelley's theology at this point in his mental history. Warning his readers to distinguish between his own utterances and the dramatic utterances of his characters, he writes: "The erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being, for instance, is spoken against, but not the Supreme Being itself. The belief which some superstitious persons whom I have brought upon the stage entertain of the Deity, as injurious to the character of his benevolence, is widely different from my own. In recommending also a great and important change in the spirit which animates the social institutions of mankind, I have avoided all flattery to those violent and malignant passions of our nature which are ever on the watch to mingle with and to alloy the most beneficial innovations. There is no quarter given to revenge, or envy, or prejudice. Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world." It is evident from this passage that Shelley is all but an avowed Platonist. Love is the ultimate power, the "Supreme Being itself." In the doctrine of the neo-Platonists, the ultimate Power, the One, is not a person. It is the impersonal source of all Beauty, Truth, and Love.

The dedication of the poem, "To Mary," is a moving performance. In it Shelley relates a little of his own spiritual autobiography, telling the moment on a May morning when he became a dedicated spirit:

... A fresh May-dawn it was,  
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,  
And wept, I knew not why; until there rose  
From the near school-room voices that, alas!  
Were but one echo from a world of woes—  
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

And then I clasped my hands and looked around,  
But none was near to mock my streaming eyes  
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground—  
So without shame I spake:—"I will be wise,  
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies  
Such power, for I grow weary to behold  
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize  
Without reproach or check."

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Thereafter he acquired knowledge and from its "secret store wrought linked armour for his soul. A sense of loneliness drove him to seek love—

Yet never found I one not false to me

until he found Mary "beautiful and calm and free" in her "young wisdom." Thenceforth, secure in sympathy and understanding he is strong to face the world with her:

Truth's deathless voice pauses among mankind!  
If there must be no response to my cry—  
If men must rise and stamp with fury blind  
On his pure name who loves them,—thou and I,  
Sweet Friend! can look from our tranquillity  
Like lamps into the world's tempestuous night,—  
Two tranquil stars, while clouds are passing by  
Which wrap them from the foundering seaman's sight,  
That burn from year to year with unextinguished light.

The first canto may, as Shelley remarked, be thought of as a poem complete in itself. It is a symbolical setting for the narrative which is to follow. As an intimation of Shelley's philosophy, it is, however, most important, for it employs symbols which enter into his habitual use and it reveals some of his thought, at this stage of his development, upon the basic problems of good and evil. The poem opens with the narrator's description of a storm at that time—

When the last hope of trampled France had failed  
Like a brief dream of unremaining glory.

The narrator rising "from visions of despair" perceives in the tumult of the clouds above a raging sea a fight between an Eagle and a Serpent. This uncertain contest is waged until the Eagle frees itself from the Serpent and flies wearily away. The Serpent falling wounded into the Sea is rescued by a woman in a boat.

Upon the sea-mark a small boat did wait,  
Fair as herself, like Love by Hope left desolate.

The woman cherishes the wounded Serpent in her breast and taking the narrator in her "boat of rare device" sails with him over the sea and explains to him the meaning of the contest he has witnessed.

From immemorial time a contest has been waged:

## Manicheistic Symbolism

Two Powers o'er mortal things dominion hold,  
 Ruling the world with a divided lot,  
 Immortal, all-pervading, manifold.

These two powers are symbolized in "a blood-red Comet and the Morning Star" the visible forms of Evil and of Good. In the contest between these twin powers, the Good, personified in the Morning Star, was worsted and transformed "to a dire Snake," whereupon the spirit of Evil ruled the world, his powers being

Fear, Hatred, Faith, and Tyranny, who spread  
 Those subtle nets which snare the living and the dead.

But the Spirit of Good, the Snake, "renewed the doubtful war." Thrones were shaken and "Greece arose" to whose "bards and sages"

In dream, the golden-pinioned Genii came,  
 Even where they slept amid the night of ages,  
 Steeping their hearts in the divinest flame  
 Which thy breath kindled, Power of holiest name!

Thereafter the contest of Good and Evil was at various times renewed:

When round pure hearts a host of hope assemble,  
 The Snake and Eagle meet—the world's foundations tremble!

The power of Evil, formerly omnipotent, is now insecure. The "victor Fiend . . . now quails and fears."

The theology and symbolism of these passages is fairly evident. Theologically they are Manicheistic. Shelley seemingly postulates a world for whose mastery Evil and Good strive uncertainly, though with Evil, thus far, victorious. The Serpent, symbol of Good, recalls the Gnostic philosophy in which the good principle, or knowledge, is described as the Serpent that tempted man, who, though expelled from Eden, nevertheless by means of knowledge is enabled to defy God. In this philosophy there is, as customarily in Shelley's philosophy, a reversal of the usual terms. The triumphant principle, or God, is, in reality, Evil. The good principle, the Serpent, is defeated but not destroyed. It is restored by Love and Hope. The woman seemingly is the personification of Hope and the boat seemingly the symbol of Love. This interpretation is borne out by Shelley's subsequent use of the same symbol. In *The Witch of Atlas* the boat in which the Witch is driven by the power of the Hermaphrodite is a boat made for Venus and the power of the Hermaphrodite is electricity, the physical form

of that energy whose spiritual form is love. The boat, in neo-Platonic imagery, is the vehicle of the soul or of the gods and goddesses. The interest of the employment of the figure in *The Revolt of Islam* is that it is the first instance we have encountered of its clear symbolic use in a neo-Platonic sense, although the employment of the boat in *Alastor* might, doubtfully, be so interpreted. Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam* is for the first time experimenting with the symbols whose use later becomes habitual. Other instances of neo-Platonic symbolism will shortly occur to reinforce the statement.

The lady who cherishes the Serpent, symbol of Good and of Knowledge, is in her dreams beloved of the Morning Star. Her heart, too, is "nurtured in divinest lore," from books left her by a dying poet, "a youth with hoary hair." The passage is suggestive of the poet described in *Alastor* and again of the "phantom among men" in *Adonais* by which, presumably, Shelley meant himself. The lady of *The Revolt of Islam* suggests likewise the "fair maid" of *Alastor*. Shelley's obsession with this recurrent theme is significant. It symbolizes, apparently, the pursuit of ideal beauty. In the particular instances under discussion I have tentatively identified the lady as Hope. But it may very well be that she too is but another avatar of the divine goddess, the heavenly Venus, or Minerva, to be thought of as cherishing and inspiring the Good. It is the hope of realizing ideal beauty which inspires both the poet and the Serpent, personification of Good, Liberty, Knowledge.

With this poem the reader must begin to acquaint himself with Shelley's symbols. Their meaning is in general clear, I believe. Nevertheless it is well not to seek in them too narrow a consistency and to deny Shelley flexibility in their use, but to remember that both in the ancient myths and in the philosophy of neo-Platonism the same force or divinity may be known under different names. Minerva, Diana, and Venus are, for instance, a trinity which is also a unity. And in neo-Platonism the One, the Absolute, is indifferently known as the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Each symbol and each personification must be judged in its immediate context. Such flexibility is highly convenient to a poet, nor does confusion arise once the root meaning of the symbol is understood.

In *The Revolt of Islam*, the lady loved by the Morning Star, whether Hope or the Spirit of Beauty, or Love, which may be identical with Beauty, aids man in his struggle against tyranny. Now in his defeat she cherishes and restores the Serpent and in her magic boat she bears the Serpent and the narrator across the ocean (symbol

of universal being?) to a temple "such as mortal hand has never built." It is the native home of genius. On its walls are displayed the "Spirit's history" which is "a tale of passionate change," phrases suggestive of the unfolding in time, the evolution manifest in earthly forms, of the creative spirit of the universe. And on thrones beneath the dome of the temple are seated—

The Great who had departed from mankind  
A mighty Senate. . . .

One throne is vacant. But the Lady and the Serpent are transformed, the throne is occupied, seemingly by a dual spirit, male and female, which had been Serpent and Lady and are now one. Then the male aspect of the divinity steps forth and tells the tale of his experiences on earth when, as a divided spirit, as Laon and Cythna, he—or they—took on human form, labored to improve the lot of man, and suffered martyrdom.

The mystical implications of these incidents are apparent but not easily interpreted, for they suggest experiences—dreams and imaginings—not to be wholly rationalized. The conception of a hall of immortals, a Valhalla of the intellect, to which go the great spirits of earth and whence they return at need, taking on earthly forms, is one to be found in Theosophy, in neo-Platonism, and variously in the writings of mystics. "A. E." somewhere employs similar imagery. It would be interesting to know its history. Perhaps it is an idea innate in minds of a certain bent, those who feel the alien character of human existence and their kinship with some other life intuitively apprehended. Shelley, because of his knowledge of Platonism and neo-Platonism with their doctrine of reincarnation, may easily enough, with no definite suggestion from other sources, have conceived of such a Valhalla as he depicts. I am inclined to this belief because there are other mystical experiences suggested in Shelley's life and works for which there is no evident explanation in influences derived from without. It is difficult for the literary historian to explain such experiences. Indeed, it seems necessary to postulate a certain kind of experience as native to the mystical character and as spontaneously arising therefrom. Emily Brontë is a case in point. Her poetry clearly implies visions akin to those of the mystics, Oriental and others; yet it has never been shown, so far as I am aware, that she had knowledge of Oriental philosophy or the literature of mysticism. Shelley had such knowledge and it cannot therefore be dogmatically asserted that the Hall of the Spirits in *The Revolt of Islam* is a wholly spontaneous

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creation, born of some dream or vision. It has nevertheless that air. At the least it is evidence of Shelley's growing mysticism. Those forces in him which in his younger years were held in check by a sceptical intellect are asserting themselves and modifying his earlier rationalism.

Laon, the returned spirit, in the remainder of the poem relates his earthly adventures wherein he and his foster sister-wife Cythna encountered the evil forces of the world, inspired a revolution, and were in the end martyred. In the account there is a good deal of autobiographic material and more of Shelley's criticism of human institutions. In his youth Laon is aware of "traditions dark" and "evil creeds." Life is an evil imprisonment to those who feel for their kind. But the evil which men endure—and it is a point of the greatest importance in the history of Shelley's thought—he ascribes to their own sufferance:

For they all pined in bondage; body and soul,  
Tyrant and slave, victim and torturer, bent  
Before one Power, to which supreme control  
Over their will by their own weakness lent  
Made all its many names omnipotent.

The will, though weak, is explicitly declared free in essence. Evil exists because men tolerate it. It is an idea which Shelley was to enunciate more powerfully in subsequent poems.

The youthful Laon reads in the ruins of civilizations past the records of a better time, of "mightier men":

Such man has been, and such may yet become!  
Ay, wiser, greater, gentler even than they  
Who on the fragments of yon shattered dome  
Have stamped the sign of power!

The lines introduce a problem which is to perplex our later speculations as to the meaning of certain passages in *Prometheus*. What was the basis of Shelley's belief in a golden age of the past? Rousseau and others had prated of the noble savage, an idea, which, as we have seen, Shelley explicitly rejected (page 158). Yet he seems to have been impressed with the evidences extant of great civilizations which had reached a degree of progress which surpasses ours and which for some reason had perished. The evidences of this past achievement I have elsewhere discussed, most notably the astronomer Bailly's belief in a civilization of a high order which once flourished in Central Asia.\*

\* *A Newton Among Poets*, p. 170.

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The new discoveries of the paleontologist seemed in Shelley's time to point likewise to the same conclusion. The geological assumption based on these findings was that some catastrophe, or a series of catastrophes, had destroyed in times past civilizations more advanced than ours. It was an awkward theory to reconcile with evolutionary beliefs elsewhere derived. In the present instance, Shelley, bent upon finding an incentive to reform, finds in these remains of the past, a stimulus to the reformer and revolutionist. If man has once been great and free—not wholly a warrantable assumption—he has within him the power to reattain the level of the past.

Laon resolves, therefore, to become a prophet of the revolution. He seeks sympathy and understanding in others and thinks he has found one friend at least whom he can trust:

And that this friend was false may now be said  
Calmly—that he like other men could weep  
Tears which are lies, and could betray and spread  
Snares for that guileless heart which for his own had bled.

Hogg, reading these lines, may have guessed who was meant. The friend's treachery would have brought Laon to suicide had it not been for a "great aim" which led him to the study of those "deathless minds" which, when they have passed, leave "a path of light." From the study of the noble minds of the past,

As from a mine of magic store, I drew  
Words which were weapons; round my heart there grew  
The adamantine armor of their power;  
And from my fancy wings of golden hue  
Sprang forth—

The lines, which are clearly autobiographical, tell the making of a philosopher and poet.

In stanza XXIII, in the description of the child Cythna, occurs an image which Shelley employs symbolically in later poems:

... in her lightness  
Most like some radiant cloud of morning dew  
Which wanders through the waste air's pathless blue  
To nourish some far desert.

\*The symbol of the dew as the agent for fertility and, intellectually, as the means to enlightenment, is employed subsequently in *Prometheus*

## Conscious Employment of Symbolism 213

and elsewhere in a like sense, though not always with so obvious a meaning as here. The importance of *The Revolt of Islam* for the student lies in the fact that Shelley uses consciously figures which, grown familiar with use, he employs with seeming unconsciousness in later poems. To understand these subsequent meanings it is therefore important to remark the first employment of each symbol, becoming familiar with it as the poet employs it with increasing dexterity. It has not been sufficiently remarked in Shelleyan criticism that Shelley's themes, images, and symbols are relatively few in number but are often repeated, a fact which makes for their intelligibility when they are chronologically studied. That themes are so often repeated and the same images and symbols reemployed is due to Shelley's concern with ideas. Even in his lyrics emotion is usually blent with an idea, as, for instance, in the *Ode to the West Wind*, and *To a Skylark*.

Laon in the song which Cythna loved had "peopled with thoughts the boundless universe," dispersing "the cloud of that unutterable curse which clings upon mankind." To his "holy and heroic verse" all things became subject: †

✓ Earth, sea and sky, the planets, life, and fame  
And fate, or whate'er else binds the world's wondrous frame.

What other than that evil of the universe, man's abjectness, is meant by the "unutterable curse" is not explicitly stated. Nor is it certain what Shelley implies in his last line. The poet seemingly doubts whether it is fate which "binds the world's wondrous frame." In *Queen Mab* he was sure that it was "divine Necessity" which rules all things. The conviction of his earlier belief is now lacking, but he has not yet attained another. It remains to be seen if, indeed, he ever did subsequently attain so dogmatic a philosophy as his youthful faith in materialism and Necessity.

Age, Laon perceives, cannot burst the chains which fetter life. It has not the courage which, only, resides in youth. In Cythna Laon perceives the hope not only of youth but for the freeing of one half of enslaved humanity:

✓ "Never will peace and human nature meet  
Till free and equal man and woman greet  
Domestic peace; and ere this power can make  
In human hearts its calm and holy seat,  
This slavery must be broken"—



Cythna resolves to devote herself to the emancipation of woman, for only as woman is freed so also can man be. They separate on their separate missions, to meet again:

"Yon desert wide and deep, holds no recess  
 Within whose happy silence, thus embraced,  
 We might survive all ills in one caress;  
 Nor doth the grave—I fear 'tis passionless—  
 Nor yon cold vacant Heaven:—we meet again  
 Within the minds of men. . . ."

The lines imply, seemingly, doubt of human immortality, Shelley's uncertainty as to which we have already traced to this point. The reader who has followed these vacillations is tempted to believe that they are prompted more by momentary feeling than by reason, or, it may be, are due to the state of his health. When he wrote *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley was unwell and believed he had not long to live.

The third canto opens with the image employed in *Mont Blanc*. Laon's thoughts in sleep seemed—

As if they might ten thousand years outnumber  
 Of waking life, the visions of a dream  
 Which hid in one dim gulf the troubled stream  
 Of mind; a boundless chaos wild and vast,  
 Whose limits yet were never memory's theme.

The implication is that in sleep the mind is released from time and ranges not only in the past but in the future, a speculation of peculiar interest as anticipating certain theories advanced today. In the dream Laon and Cythna are happy in a day surpassing the brightness of Nature, a happiness which ends in a nightmare of pursuit by "legions of foul and ghastly shapes." He awakes to find Cythna in the hands of slavers, seeks to aid her, is struck down and borne captive to the top of a tall column where he is left fettered to die slowly of exposure. The tortures which he endures, the worst being mental, are anticipatory of the tortures inflicted upon Prometheus in the later poem. From these he is freed by an old man "stately and beautiful" and borne away in a boat over the sea. The Hermit we know from Mrs. Shelley's statement to be Dr. Lind, and the feverish nightmare from which Laon is rescued naturally suggests the illness of Shelley's youth in which Dr. Lind was summoned to free the boy from his fear of his father—an incident whose authenticity the biographers debate. The rescuer was Dr. Lind and it was Dr. Lind to whom

Shelley always felt gratitude for his intellectual emancipation as introducing him to liberal thought and, it is supposed, acquainting him with Godwin's *Political Justice*. It may be then that the tower from which Laon is rescued has an allegorical significance. Tower in Shelley's later usage is symbolical of the outward looking mind, the mind which is concerned with sensations and observations, as contrasted with the cave, which is the symbol of the inward looking or contemplative mind. The episode may, therefore, symbolically depict the awakening of thought, of philosophic speculation, in a mind which heretofore had concerned itself with the external world and has turned now from science to metaphysics.

In the fourth canto the gentle Hermit nurses Laon to slow recovery and we learn the character of his thought.

. . . he had beheld the woe  
In which mankind was bound, but deemed that fate  
Which made them abject would preserve them so.

But stirred to hope of revolution by Laon's poetry he has ceased to be passive, has rescued the poet, and now recounts the change which has come over men's hearts: their hope that they may destroy bigotry and tyranny and reconstruct human society. This aspiration to change has been due to the operation of Laon's poetry. The old faiths, "bloody, and false, and cold" are dying. Men nourish the hopes of a diviner day and tyrants tremble. "A maiden fair" is emancipating women, teaching "equal laws and justice." Revolution is imminent, and that no blood may be spilt the Hermit asks Laon to go to the city and employ his powers of persuasion. Laon, aged beyond his years and heartbroken because of the supposed death of Cythna, feels nevertheless the call of duty. Shelley's imagery anticipates his later use by the employment of the cloud, as in a previous recorded instance the dew, as a symbol of fertility which in its intellectual aspect may be thought of as enlightenment:

Doth the cloud perish when the beams are fled  
Which steeped its skirts in gold? or dark and lone,  
Doth it not through the paths of night unknown,  
On outspread wings of its own wind upborne,  
Pour rain upon the earth?

The fifth canto tells of Laon's return to the city without whose walls are encamped the armed defenders of tyranny and the patriots.

The patriots are surprised while asleep and many killed, but Laon by his eloquence persuades them from vengeance:

"Oh, wherefore should ill ever flow from ill,  
And pain still keener pain forever breed?  
We all are brethren—even the slaves who kill  
For hire are men; and to avenge misdeed  
On the misdoer doth but Misery feed  
With her own broken heart!"

Shelley, it is evident, has adopted the ethical teachings of Christ and believes in returning good for evil. Friend and foe return in amity to the city—

... a mighty brotherhood  
Linked by a jealous interchange of good;  
A glorious pageant, more magnificent  
Than kingly slaves arrayed in gold and blood,  
When they return from carnage...

The tyrant in his empty palace, alone but for one child, is saved by Laon from the vengeance of his subjects. Again Laon's words paraphrase the exhortations of Christ to return good for evil. Laon then encounters Laone, veiled, the "fair maid" who had emancipated women. She, as priestess of the new religion of humanity, recites an ode to the primal force:

"O Spirit vast and deep as Night and Heaven,  
Mother and soul of all to which is given  
The light of life, the loveliness of being!"

The Spirit is to be identified with

"Nature, or God, or Love, or Pleasure,  
Or Sympathy...."

It seemingly is also—

"Eldest of things, divine Equality!"

This primal force now binding the hearts of men signalizes—

"The dawn of mind, which, upwards on a pinion  
Borne, swift as sunrise, far illumines space,  
And clasps this barren world in its own bright embrace!"

The lines anticipate ideas more powerfully expressed in *Prometheus Unbound*.

The host of the free whom Laone has addressed then partake of a communal and vegetarian banquet and retire to sleep. They are awakened to disquietude, for the neighboring nations—the analogy is clearly to France of the Revolution—have attacked to crush liberty. The patriots are routed and slaughtered but Laon is rescued by Laone who is, of course, the long-lost Cythna. She bears him away on her black steed and the two seek refuge in a ruined building. Then, in stanza XXIX of the sixth canto, Shelley employs the neo-Platonic symbolism which holds so important a place in his subsequent poetry:

We know not where we go, or what sweet dream  
May pilot us through caverns strange and fair  
Of far and pathless passion, while the stream  
Of life our bark doth on its whirlpools bear,  
Spreading swift wings as sails to the dim air;  
Nor should we seek to know, so the devotion  
Of love and gentle thoughts be heard still there  
Louder and louder from the utmost Ocean  
Of universal life, attuning its commotion.

Already we have encountered Shelley's symbols of cloud, dew, and stream. Here other variants on the water imagery are explicitly employed: ship, stream, whirlpool, the ocean of universal life. Also there is the cave, symbol of subjectivity, the inner life shut away from the world without; and sometimes of all earthly life shut away from divine reality. Shelley's early employment of these symbols is more conscious than later when their use is so habitual as to have become a familiar language.

The union which Laon and Cythna experience in their place of refuge is not without mystical implications also:

... What is the strong control  
Which leads the heart that dizzy steep to climb  
Where far over the world those vapors roll  
Which blend two restless frames in one reposing soul?

It is the shadow which doth float unseen,  
But not unfelt, o'er blind mortality.

The lines recall the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* in which "the awful shadow of some unseen power" is spoken of. Earthly union, perfect

## Reunion with the Affinity

love, is then similar to, or inspired by, the divine union of the soul with the love and beauty of the One. The idea is suggested also by earlier lines in stanza XXXIV:

And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall  
Two disunited spirits when they leap  
In union from this earth's obscure and fading sleep.

The Platonic implication of these lines is the soul's experience upon death when it is united with its complement, its affinity. It is interesting to observe, too, that the lines imply the immortality of the soul, which, in an earlier citation from the poem, Shelley seemed to doubt. The strength of his belief in survival seems dependent on the degree of the Platonism which inspires him. At the period of *The Revolt of Islam* his Platonism apparently is a growing force in his intellectual life but not yet dominant.

In canto VII Cythna tells the story of her ravishment by the tyrant, her imprisonment in a cave by the sea, and the birth and theft of her child. The stanzas are exceedingly deft and flexible and display great descriptive power. There is in them, however, no notable employment of symbolism unless it be the use of the familiar cave as a place of imprisonment, symbol of Cythna's madness, of the mind shut within itself beside the restless sea of universal being. Lines in stanza XXVIII suggest some such implication:

... What was this cave?  
Its deep foundation no firm purpose knows  
Immutable, resistless, strong to save,  
Like mind while yet it mocks the all-devouring grave.

Stanza XXXI more explicitly expatiates on the interpretative power of mind, its power of deriving from itself, because of its likeness to the divine mind, the meaning of all things:

"My mind became the book through which I grew  
Wise in all human wisdom, and its cave,  
Which like a mine I rifled through and through,  
To me the keeping of its secrets gave—  
One mind, the type of all, the moveless wave  
Whose calm reflects all moving things that are,  
Necessity, and love, and life, the grave,  
And sympathy, fountains of hope and fear,  
Justice, and truth, and time, and the world's natural sphere."

The subjective, even mystical, character of Shelley's thought is evi-

dent. Not in the external universe but in the individual mind, by reason of its likeness to the divine mind, is truth to be sought. The lines imply Shelley's evolution from scientist to philosopher.

Subsequent stanzas elaborate the idea that truth and wisdom are to be found within the mind itself; that the mind can, by the creations of its will, evoke human throngs and grow

"Familiar with the shock and the surprise  
And war of earthly minds....

. . . . .  
And thus my prison was the populous earth—"

The symbol of the fountain is in this imagery employed in the neo-Platonic sense:

"... There is some recompense  
For hope whose fountain can be thus profound."

Neo-Platonism speaks of the intellectual fountains which spring in the cave of the individual mind, symbolizing its affinity with the divine mind which enlightens it. Shelley's employment of the fountain of hope is analogous, for the hope of an emancipated world which Cythna cherishes is a vision of the future, the liberation which prophetically exists in the divine mind but which has not yet been realized in the worldly order of time. These thoughts are prophetic as are the harbingers of spring—a figure which Shelley employs more powerfully both in *Prometheus* and in the *Ode to the West Wind*.

In the eighth canto Cythna tells the story of her escape from the cavern reft by an earthquake, her rescue by a ship, and her words to the sailors. She shows them their enslavement to the Power which was the creation of "some moon-struck sophist":

"The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,  
His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown."

The thought is the familiar one, that man creates God in the likeness of himself, an evil God made strong by custom, bigotry, and tyranny, a God worshiped in the fear of hell. Love is the sole, the ultimate, power of the world:

"O Love, who to the hearts of wandering men  
Art as the calm to Ocean's weary waves!  
Justice, or Truth, or Joy! those only can  
From slavery and religion's labyrinth-caves  
Guide us, as one clear star the seaman saves.'"

Now it is not so, for Hate, not Love, rules the world.

“‘So man is made the captive of his brother.’”

Hate and Fear are now throned “above the Highest.” Man, in his pursuit of gold, weaves

“‘A lasting chain for his own slavery—’”

These evils need not be. Men may arise and overthrow the domination of gold and kings that Love may reassume its sway over the world. The thought that men create the evils by which they are enslaved is that which, more profoundly expressed, is the theme subsequently in *Prometheus*. Its tentative expression here is but another instance of Shelley’s repetition of ideas and images. In his early works these are expressed in a way which he evidently found inadequate, for he continues to employ them until their expression satisfied him. The evil of the world Cythna proclaims is due to “the dark idolatry of self,” a thought which links up with the neo-Platonic philosophy and which will more explicitly appear in subsequent poems.

The sailors of the slave ship free their captives destined for the markets of Constantinople and take an oath to war for liberty. The spirit of liberty proves contagious and in the city Cythna’s words bring hope to all those enslaved, especially to the women. The Tyrant trembles in fear and sends his priests to curse the rebels. Law and custom and bribery avail not. The nation throws off its yoke only to be crushed, as had been told in the earlier cantos, by the invasion of neighboring armies. Thence escape Laon and Cythna to the ruin in which Cythna has told the story of her sufferings and defeat. Together they have “survived a ruin wide and deep.” To Cythna—

“... Violence and wrong are as a dream

Which rolls from steadfast truth,—an unreturning stream.”

Then in stanza XXV of canto IX and in subsequent stanzas Cythna prophesies the return of spring after this “winter of the world.” Thought and imagery anticipate the better known *Ode to the West Wind* and the epilogue to *Hellas*:

“This is the Winter of the world; and here

We die, even as the winds of Autumn fade,

Expiring in the frore and foggy air.

Behold! Spring comes, though we must pass who made

The promise of its birth,—”

## Immortality in the Hearts of the Good 221

Stanza XXVIII is epitaph and prophecy of the great dead, of the poet conscious of his own impending death, of others to come imbued with the same hope and faith as his:

“The good and mighty of departed ages  
Are in their graves, the innocent and free,  
Heroes, and Poets, and prevailing Sages,  
Who leave the vesture of their majesty  
To adorn and clothe this naked world;—and we  
Are like to them—such perish, but they leave  
All hope, or love, or truth, or liberty,  
Whose forms their mighty spirits could conceive,  
To be a rule and law to ages that survive.”

The immortality which Cythna envisages will be ultimately in the hearts of the good, though she perceives that “Calumny meanwhile shall feed on us”—

“... and near the throne  
And at the altar most accepted thus  
Shall sneers and curses be;—what we have done  
None shall dare vouch, though it be truly known;  
That record shall remain when they must pass  
Who built their pride on its oblivion.”

It is one of the several passages in Shelley which in the accuracy of its forecast justifies Shelley's contention that poets are prophets, apprehending the shadow cast by futurity upon the present. That such an immortality is the sole immortality for which men may hope—an influence upon the world yet to be—seems to be Cythna's belief. Yet she is unsure:

“... Reason cannot know  
What sense can neither feel nor thought conceive;  
There is delusion in the world—and woe,  
And fear, and pain—we know not whence we live,  
Or why, or how, or what mute Power may give  
Their being to each plant, and star, and beast,  
Or even these thoughts.—”

✓ Canto X describes the war of extermination waged by the armies of neighboring kings upon the rebels to the Tyrant. The picture of the slaughter and of the ensuing famine and plague is descriptive of what the world has subsequently witnessed, surpassing the desola-



tion of the Napoleonic wars. Militarists should have the passage excised from the permitted edition of Shelley's works, if indeed his work should be granted publication at all. Doubtless it will be proscribed when its implications are more generally understood and its possession will be held treasonable. Thus far the world has blandly ignored Shelley's evident meaning and has been content to calumniate him as he foresaw. It is an inadequate precaution. An occasional youngster is likely to read him intelligently and develop heretical ideas of religion, war, and social injustice. It is improbable that Shelley or Christ or all the poets and prophets together will suffice to save the modern world from the destruction on which it is bent; but to accelerate the débâcle, the burning of their printed words by the hangman, after the good old custom, might help somewhat. It is a full picture of the horrors of war and war's aftermath which Shelley draws. He had knowledge only of what he had seen in devastated France in 1814. But he was a poet and possessed of imagination. Modern realistic accounts given by eye-witnesses do not surpass the horror and accuracy of his portrayal, both in its physical and its mental aspects, of the madness of war, which is surpassed only by the madness of religious bigotry and hate. That, too, Shelley depicts in horrible detail in the concluding stanzas of the tenth canto.

The eleventh canto recounts Laon's voluntary return to the plague-ridden city where he is desired as a sacrifice to propitiate the evil gods worshiped by men. He addresses the Tyrant, his ministers, and the cruel priests:

"... the mighty and the wise  
Who, if ye dared, might not aspire to less  
Than ye conceive of power, should fear the lies  
Which thou, and thou, didst frame for mysteries  
To blind your slaves!"

These are the slaves of Custom to whom they have sold their hearts:

"Ye seek for peace, and when ye die, to dream  
No evil dreams;—all mortal things are cold  
And senseless then; if aught survive, I deem  
It must be love and joy, for they immortal seem.

"Fear not the future, weep not for the past.  
Oh, could I win your ears to dare be now  
Glorious, and great, and calm! that ye would cast  
Into the dust those symbols of your woe,

Purple, and gold, and steel! that ye would go  
 Proclaiming to the nations whence ye came  
 That Want and Plague and Fear from slavery flow;  
 And that mankind is free, and that the shame  
 Of royalty and faith is lost in freedom's fame!"

Laon, disguised, bargains with the Tyrant and his slaves for the betrayal of their dreaded enemy in return for the promise to send Cythna uninjured to the new home of freedom, America.

"An epitaph of glory for the tomb  
 Of murdered Europe may thy fame be made,  
 Great People! as the sands shalt thou become;  
 Thy growth is swift as morn when night must fade;  
 The multitudinous Earth shall sleep beneath thy shade."

Cythna comes, however, to join Laon in death. The Priest absolves the Tyrant of his oath to free her and she perishes with Laon in the fire. They awake to a new world which, wonderingly, they perceive is Paradise. Then in some twenty stanzas Shelley describes this world to which death has freed them, a description whose chief interest lies in the employment of image and symbol which he later uses in *The Witch of Atlas* and in *Prometheus Unbound*. The spirit of Cythna's child guides them in her translucent boat of pearl down a tumultuous stream to the calm sea or lake of universal being fed by four great cataracts and dotted with green islands. The boat, borne by the "musical air," is similar to that of the *Witch of Atlas*. The propulsive force of music is employed as in *Prometheus*. Stream and ocean are symbols similarly employed in *The Witch* and in *Prometheus*. What, then, may be the implication of the "four great cataracts" which feed the lake? The expression is on the face of it symbolical. Conceivably he may mean the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and the stream down which the boat is borne thus recall the image of neo-Platonic usage—

To roll incessant with impetuous speed,  
 Like some dark river, into Matter's sea.

The sea to which Laon and Cythna return is that on whose shores the Temple of the Spirit is erected, and the sea itself, in the terms of the description, seems more spiritual than material, though what is material and what spiritual in neo-Platonic terminology it is not always easy to say, the two being, seemingly, but aspects of the same

thing and each the shadow of the other. Any interpretation of the four cataracts, is, therefore, in the absence of a more certain clue than I have found, largely guess-work. I would recall, however, a passage which I have elsewhere cited in full from Taylor's interpretation of Proclus.\*\* In this Taylor speaks of "those four gnostic powers of the soul discovered by the Pythagoreans, and embraced by Plato: *intelligence, cogitation, opinion, and imagination.*" In the sea of universal being to which Laon and Cythna return, the home of the all-embracing One, spirit and matter are indistinguishably blent. The four elements of matter and the four powers of the soul alike compose it. If this is not precisely Shelley's meaning—and I but guess—his implication must be of this order, for the "four great cataracts" is unmistakably a symbolical expression.

*The Revolt of Islam* adds nothing much to what we already have learned of Shelley's social philosophy, his ideal of an equalitarian society. Yet the temper of the poem is different from that of *Queen Mab* in which are expressed similar social and political ideals. He is no longer hopeful of a sudden realization of his dreams nor a believer in the power of unaided reason to persuade mankind of the stupidity of their ways. The appeal has become more emotional than intellectual, is persuasive in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Shelley has come to realize the inadequacy of reason both as an instrument to conversion and as a means to the explanation of the riddle of the universe. Cythna, anticipating annihilation at death, qualifies her belief with the reservation that in these matters reason is inadequate. The end may be wholly otherwise. Our deepest beliefs, our faith in some better future, are based on intuition. This explicit acknowledgment of the priority of intuition and the subordinate place of reason marks a definite stage in Shelley's intellectual development. He has ceased to be narrowly a rationalist and is on the road to mysticism. His employment of some of the symbols of neo-Platonic use—cave, stream, sea of universal being—indicates the growing influence of Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus upon his thought.

†Suggested, too, though not so explicitly expounded as in subsequent poems, is his belief in the freedom of the moral will which, in his earliest work, he had denied; not perceiving the incompatibility of a necessitarian philosophy with his belief in human perfectibility. Man he now conceives as enslaved to evil and custom through his own acquiescence. It is the function of poets, idealists, and reformers to awaken in him the sense of his degradation and show that in him—

\*\* *Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation*, p. 59.

self lies the power to shake off the fetters with which he has bound himself. He has made his God in his own image and this evil God he can destroy if he so wishes. This idea is the central theme of *Prometheus Unbound* wherein it is worked out with a subtler philosophy and vastly greater power. But it is clear that in *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley has renounced his earlier belief in moral necessity. Whether this change is due wholly to his increasing interest in Platonism or whether it is the product of his own philosophic thinking, or whether, as seems more likely, it is the product of the two together, cannot be stated with certainty. The general trend of his thought, with its increasing reliance upon faith and intuition and its emphasis upon the will as the tool to enfranchisement from the past, from tradition, is evident enough.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Were *The Revolt of Islam* the last expression of Shelley's philosophy it would be necessary to dwell far longer upon it than I have done. But it is no more than a stage upon a journey whose destination it clearly intimates. In it are announced ideas, themes, which Shelley later exploits with greater philosophic and poetic power. It is, as a poem, overlong and its action, to my taste, is tedious and repetitive. Nevertheless it has great passages. Descriptively it is often beautiful and powerful and its grasp upon reality, upon the world of the actual, upon man's political struggles and his submission to bigotry, evil, and tyranny, far firmer than in *Queen Mab*.<sup>1</sup> Shelley matured with extraordinary speed. *The Revolt of Islam* is the work of a poet and an idealist but not of one who fails to perceive the world of the actual. Life as man has made it is a horrible business; Shelley perceives it. He averts his eyes at times to depict the world as it might be or to imagine a Paradise in which love and beauty are all powerful. But in doing so he does not lose his grip upon the world about him. He sees it to be his task as poet and reformer to emulate the great minds of the past and transmit the torch of hope as they have done. The Golden Age may be far in the future but it is realizable if man so wills. Poet and dreamer and reformer are hierophants of that future.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

### *Italy: Growth of Platonism*



SHELLEY's health in the winter of 1817-1818 was precarious and he believed himself consumptive. He writes to Godwin on December 7, 1817: "My health has been materially worse. My feelings at intervals are of a deadly and torpid kind, or awakened to a state of such unnatural and keen excitement, that, only to instance the organ of sight, I find the very blades of grass and the boughs of distant trees present themselves to me with microscopical distinctness. Towards evening, I sink into a state of lethargy and inanimation, and often remain for hours on the sofa, between sleep and waking, a prey to the most painful irritability of thought. Such, with little intermission, is my condition. The hours devoted to study are selected with vigilant caution from among these periods of endurance. It is not for this that I think of traveling to Italy, even if I knew that Italy would relieve me. But I have experienced a decisive pulmonary attack; and although at present it has passed away without any very considerable vestige of its existence, yet this symptom sufficiently shows the true nature of my disease to be consumption. . . . In the event of its assuming any decided shape, it would be my *duty* to go to Italy without delay; and it is only when that measure becomes an indispensable duty that, contrary to both Mary's feelings and to mine, as they regard you, I should go to Italy. . . . It is not health, but life, that I should seek in Italy; and that, not for my own sake. . . ." The inference is clearly that Godwin objected to the proposed expedition and for reasons it is hard to believe disinterested.

In the same letter Shelley warmly commends Godwin's new novel *Mandeville*: "I think the power of 'Mandeville' is inferior to nothing you have done." This and other commendatory remarks Godwin sent at once, for advertising purposes, to the *Chronicle*. Shelley, on December 11, writes that had he believed Godwin would do this he would have expressed himself more fully. "The effect of your favourable consideration of my powers, as they relate to the judgment of the degree and kind of approbation due to the intellectual executions of others, has emboldened me to write not a volume, but a more copious statement of my feelings as they were excited by 'Mandeville.' This I have sent to the *Examiner*." He continues not

without a mild and justifiable malice: "I have read and considered all that you say about my general powers, and the particular instance of the poem in which I have attempted to develop them. Nothing can be more satisfactory to me than the interest which your admonitions express. But I think you are mistaken in some points with regard to the peculiar nature of my powers, whatever be their amount. I listened with deference and self-suspicion to your censures of 'Laon and Cythna'; but the productions of mine which you commend hold a very low place in my own esteem, and this reassured me, in some degree at least."

The *Remarks on "Mandeville" and Mr. Godwin* which Shelley wrote for the *Examiner* is a more than generous encomium of Godwin as philosopher and novelist, one unduly neglected by his English contemporaries. "'Political Justice,'" he declares, "is the first moral system explicitly founded upon the doctrine of the negativeness of rights and the positiveness of duties,—an obscure feeling of which has been the basis of all the political liberty and private virtue in the world.... Godwin has been to the present age in moral philosophy what Wordsworth is in poetry." This is high praise indeed, which does credit to Shelley's kindness of heart if not to his judgment. His criticism suffers somewhat from a defect of acidity, a generosity which leads him to stress the merits of a work he admires and to minimize its defects. It is necessary to look twice to realize that he is not unaware of weaknesses but chooses to pass lightly over them. He compares the story with *Caleb Williams* and declares that while no character in it can compare with Falkland, yet as a whole "'Mandeville' yields in interest and importance to none of the productions of the author." There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Shelley's praise, or to misunderstand its source, which is the resemblance of the novel's sentiments to those of *Political Justice*: "The pleadings of Henrietta to Mandeville, after his recovery from madness, in favour of virtue and of benevolent energy, compose, in every respect, the most perfect and beautiful piece of writing of modern times. It is the genuine doctrine of 'Political Justice,' presented in one perspicacious and impressive river, and clothed in such enchanting melody of language, as seems, not less than the writings of Plato, to realize those lines of Milton:—

How charming is divine Philosophy!  
Not harsh and crabbed, . . .  
But musical as is Apollo's lute."

However exaggerated in its praise of Godwin, the passage is revelatory of Shelley's own absorption in divine philosophy and of the place in it of Platonism. A figure which he employs in his review unconsciously betrays the hold which the neo-Platonic symbolism had taken upon him. In *The Revolt of Islam* the employment of the symbols of water in its various forms has been noted. In the passage just cited, analogously the "perspicacious and impressive river" is of the same category and better still is another sentence in which *Mandeville* is compared to *Caleb Williams*: "It is a wind that tears up the deepest waters of the ocean of mind." The likeness of mind or being to the ocean is a symbol which Shelley uses frequently in later poems such as *The Witch of Atlas* and *Prometheus Unbound* and with implications which strike to the root of his mystical philosophy. Thought, being, and matter are in it implicitly one and the same.

Shelley's literary criticisms, save his casual remarks in letters, are few. It is timely to consider two others written within a short time of his review of *Mandeville*. The one, on *Frankenstein*, is to be assigned to the last months of 1817 or the first of 1818. The other, written on Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, is to be ascribed to 1818, Mary Shelley recording in her journal of February 20, 1818: "copy Shelley's critique on 'Rhododaphne.'" These two, like the critique of *Mandeville*, are friendship's offerings on the altar of criticism, and are of slight importance except as, in an occasional sentence, they suggest Shelley's own philosophy. One passage in the review of *Frankenstein* rises to this dignity and deserves to be quoted, although it offers little that is new to those acquainted with Shelley's thought: "Nor are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, though indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production. They are the children, as it were, of Necessity and Human Nature. In this the direct moral of the book consists; and it is perhaps the most important, and of the most universal application, of any moral that can be enforced by example. Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn;—let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind—divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations—malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that, too often in society, those who are best qualified to be its benefactors and its ornaments, are branded by some accident with scorn, and changed, by neglect and solitude of heart, into a scourge and a curse."

The review of *Rhododaphne* was found among Leigh Hunt's

papers and was presumably sent Hunt for publication. Shelley's interest in the poem lay not only in the fact that it was the work of his friend Peacock but also in its pagan character. The review, which is incomplete, is largely a running summary of the poem interspersed with approving comments. The poem celebrates the triumph of Uranian love over the magic of a baser passion, a doctrine which, no less than the graceful lines, perhaps commended the poem to Shelley. Other than the appreciative citations and this rather meagre philosophical implication, the review has not, so far as I can detect, anything to supplement our knowledge of Shelley, unless it suggests what we may guess from other evidence, his growing absorption in Greek thought both pagan and Platonic.

Of the short poems written in 1817 and before his departure to Italy in the spring of 1818 none, I think, adds anything to what has already been remarked of Shelley's thought and symbolism. *Marianne's Dream* may contain some interesting matter could it be deciphered, but to it I have found no key. The burning city, the flood, the animated sculptures seemingly have a symbolical meaning but the symbols are not those of neo-Platonism made clear in *The Revolt of Islam*. The dream was told to Shelley by Mrs. Hunt, and the anchor, the mountain citadels, and the rest are presumably the facts which she recounted. It is guess-work, then, without some key, to interpret Shelley's reading of the experience. Perhaps were we to know the dream exactly as told to him and trace his alterations in fact and imagery, if any, a clue to the workings of his poetic imagination might be offered us. Lacking such a factual basis, I should hesitate to guess the poem's meaning. In all Shelley's poems whose themes and episodes are of his own invention, I assume that a clear meaning may be got with patience and the pursuit of the right method. From *Marianne's Dream*, inasmuch as Shelley purports to give, in this instance, the experience of another, the description may record no more than facts enigmatic both to dreamer and poet and demand for their interpretation some seer of dreams, some psychoanalyst.

Of the more familiar lyric poems of the same period, *To Constantia*, *To William Shelley*, *On Fanny Godwin*, *Ozymandias*, nothing need to be said but to remark their lyric charm, their technical expertness. I find in them nothing new as evidence of Shelley's intellectual growth save their mastery of the poetic medium. This in itself is much, but is not the concern of this book. The poem *To the Lord Chancellor*, the jurist whose decision had robbed him of his children by Harriet, deserves, however, more comment for the light



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which it throws on Shelley's nature. Shelley's invective heaped upon tyrants and bigots is always eloquent but even at an early age he distinguished between king and priest as tyrants, the slaves of custom, and king and priest as unfortunate beings so enslaved and worthy of pity. His hatred is for the abstraction, the institution, not for the unhappy agents of evil. And so, professedly, is his hatred for the Lord Chancellor. "I curse thee, though I hate thee not,—O slave!" Yet if not hatred this expresses a contempt not easily distinguishable from hatred. The vitriolic lines which precede, the curse which he invokes upon his enemy, are likewise the expression of a burning hate, not only for the cold instrument of the law's injustice, but a hate poured upon the powerful and the wealthy whose hearts are cold. Shelley was capable of hate. A little later when he wrote the terrific curse passed by Prometheus upon Jupiter he could add:

It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;  
Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine,  
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

The lines are, I think, expressive of his contrition for the one poem in which he had expressed hate for a human being not as tyrant or bigot but as a man who had done him irretrievable wrong.

On March 11, 1818, Shelley left England never to return. As his letters have shown, the trip to Italy was taken to restore his health; even, as he thought, to keep him alive. His fear of consumption appears to have been unfounded but it is difficult to determine from the diagnoses of the doctors of that day what the nature of his ailment was. Perhaps it was no more than the nervous and mental exhaustion brought on by worry, the ravages of emotional excitement, and too strenuous intellectual application. Italy certainly proved beneficial to him, for he thrived on hot weather. He was also benefited by being removed from the scene of social ills which he could do little to mitigate but which lay like a weight upon him. Throughout his brief life he bore too much of the world's misery upon him. Yet I think that as a foreigner in Italy, where nothing he could do would much assist the natives, his sense of responsibility was less acute. Moreover he had poured all his social philosophy, his radicalism, into *The Revolt of Islam*. He had done his utmost as propagandist and reformer. Seemingly his efforts had been wholly without effect, but he must have felt that he had discharged an obligation and acquitted himself in the eyes of conscience. Whatever the reason, it is at any rate clear that in Italy Shelley's genius comes all at once into bloom, and his poetry,

which before was propagandist and edifying, becomes more truly philosophic.

The esthetic effect of Italy upon him was profound. Peacock had awakened in him a taste for music and opera but Shelley seems to have cared little for painting, sculpture, and architecture until the museums and ruins of Italy, no less than the scenery, discovered in him new depths of perception and appreciation. The evidences of this esthetic awakening are everywhere apparent in the poetry of his last period, and the letters, especially those to Peacock, record many specific experiences whose influence may often be traced through a passage of prose to a metaphor or description in a poem. The beauty of scenery and of art is blent with the intellectual beauty which he had earlier learned to perceive from his study of the Platonic philosophy. It might indeed be argued, with some justice, that the influence of neo-Platonism, with its greater place for, and insistence upon beauty than is to be found in the Platonic dialogues, comes wholly to be felt in his work only after his coming to Italy. Certainly *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas* are more wholly intelligible in the symbols and philosophy of neo-Platonism than of Platonism and in both are a sheer beauty and an insistence upon the power and significance of beauty which are not to be found in his early verse.

A passage in his journal for March 26, 1818, recording the passage of the southern Alps in Savoy suggests the descriptive opening of his *Prometheus Unbound* the theme of which, it is to be inferred, was in his mind: "After dinner we ascended Les Echelles, winding along a road cut through perpendicular rocks, of immense elevation. . . . The rocks, which cannot be less than a thousand feet in perpendicular height, sometimes overhang the road on each side, and almost shut out the sky. The scene is like that described in the Prometheus of Aeschylus. Vast rifts and caverns in the granite precipices, wintry mountains with ice and snow above; the loud sounds of unseen waters within the caverns, and walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled as he describes, by the winged chariot of the ocean nymphs." Nor is the passage which immediately follows alien to the theme of *Prometheus* which depicts the evil of man's lot and its cure: "Under the dominion of this tyranny, the inhabitants of the fertile valleys, bounded by these mountains, are in a state of most frightful poverty and disease. At the foot of this ascent, were cut into the rocks at several places, stories of the misery of the inhabitants, to move the compassion of the traveller. One old man, lame and blind, crawled

out of a hole in the rock, wet with the perpetual melting of the snows of above, and dripping like a shower-bath."

Italy acted upon him like a tonic. He writes to Peacock, April, 1818: "No sooner had we arrived at Italy, than the loveliness of the earth and the serenity of the sky made the greatest difference in my sensations. I depend on these things for life; for in the smoke of cities, and the tumult of human kind, and the chilling fogs and rain of our own country, I can hardly be said to live. . . . My health is improved already—and my spirits something—and I have many literary schemes, and one in particular—which I thirst to be settled that I may begin." This work I suppose to be *Prometheus Unbound*, for *Rosalind and Helen*, though not yet revised and published, had been largely composed before his coming to Italy. It is fair to assume that Shelley's impressions of the next few months were gathered with the theme of *Prometheus* always at the back of his mind and that the letters of the ensuing period are therefore of peculiar significance in the light which they may throw upon that poem. Shelley's letter of April 20 would seem to negate this assumption, for he writes, "I have devoted this summer, and indeed the next year, to the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness. . . ." But of this only a scrap remains. He must, then, have turned soon to the Prometheus theme, work upon which he began in the summer.

The letters from Lake Como and Milan stress one of Shelley's ruling ideas, the contrast of natural beauty and human degradation. The Italians at first sight seemed to him singularly debased: "The people here, though inoffensive enough, seem both in body and soul a miserable race. The men are hardly men; they look like a tribe of stupid and shrivelled slaves, and I do not think that I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps." These impressions, Mrs. Shelley notes, "became altogether altered after a longer stay in Italy. He quickly discovered the extraordinary intelligence and genius of this wonderful people, amidst the ignorance in which they are carefully kept by their rulers, and the vices, fostered by a religious system, which these same rulers have used as their most successful engine." Such a realization could not, however, greatly alter Shelley's basic thought, that men are kept miserable and abject by tyranny and bigotry and remain so despite the influence of natural beauty upon them. Shelley shared somewhat Wordsworth's pantheistic philosophy but he had a far more realistic eye for man's misery amid even the most beautiful surroundings. Such misery he had observed in Wordsworth's own lake country, in Ireland, in

Marlow, and now again amid the more opulent beauties of Italy. He had just reason to stress, more than Wordsworth contrived to do, "what man has made of man." Nor is his mysticism such as ascribes to natural objects some magical power to soothe the savage breast and shape the minds of men to beneficence. His admiration for Wordsworth as a poet was profound but he had small regard for Wordsworth as a thinker and for Wordsworth's social apostasy he had only contempt. In a letter to Peacock of July 25, 1818, Shelley writes of the election results in England: "What a beastly and pitiful wretch that Wordsworth! That such a man should be such a poet! I can compare him with no one but Simonides, that flatterer of the Sicilian tyrants, and at the same time the most natural and tender of lyric poets."

Shelley's reading during his first months in Italy was in Greek or upon Greek themes as in the instance of Wieland's *Aristippus*. On July 10 he writes to the Gisbornes: "I am employed just now, having little better to do, in translating into my faint and inefficient periods the divine eloquence of Plato's 'Symposium'; only as an exercise, or, perhaps, to give Mary some idea of the manners and feelings of the Athenians—so different on many subjects from that of any other community that ever existed." His absorption in things Greek preparatory to the writing of *Prometheus Unbound* is clear. Passages in letters of this time intimate, too, his interest in the natural phenomena which play so large a part both in the descriptive passages of the poem and in its symbolism. In a letter to Peacock of July 25, he elaborates upon his observations of aerial phenomena: "The atmosphere here, unlike that of the rest of Italy, is diversified with clouds, which grow in the middle of the day, and sometimes bring thunder and lightning, and hail about the size of a pigeon's egg, and decrease towards the evening, leaving only those finely woven webs of vapour which we see in English skies, and flocks of fleecy and slowly-moving clouds, which all vanish before sunset; and the nights are for ever serene, and we see a star in the east at sunset—I think it is Jupiter—almost as fine as Venus was last summer; but it wants a certain silver and aerial radiance, and soft yet piercing splendour, which belongs, I suppose, to the latter planet by virtue of its at once divine and female nature. . . . I take great delight in watching the changes of the atmosphere." It would be interesting to know if it was at this time Shelley read Father Beccaria's pioneer works on the activities of atmospheric electricity in serene weather.

In a letter to Godwin of the same date, July 25, Shelley tells his

and Mary's cultural pursuits. "Mary has just finished Ariosto with me, and, indeed, has attained a very competent knowledge of Italian. She is now reading 'Livy'." He himself is doing little "except some translations from Plato, in which I exercised myself, in the despair of producing anything original. The 'Symposium of Plato,' seems to me one of the most valuable pieces of all antiquity. . . ." He writes also that he is attempting "an Essay upon the cause of some differences in sentiment between the Ancients and Moderns, with respect to the subject of the dialogue." Commending Godwin for resuming his work on an answer to Malthus (incidentally a feeble effort in the event) he continues on the political situation in England: "If Ministers do not find some means, totally inconceivable to me, of plunging the nation in war, do you imagine that they can subsist? Peace is all that a country, in the present state of England, seems to require, to afford tranquillity and leisure for attempting some remedy; not to the universal evils of all constituted society, but to the peculiar system of misrule under which those evils have been exasperated now. I wish that I had health or spirits that would enable me to enter into public affairs, or that I could find words to express all that I feel and know." Letters, some satirical verse, and the posthumously published *A Philosophical View of Reform* attest the genuineness and sincerity of this statement. I dislike to reiterate the self-evident but it seems, in view of the prevalent misconceptions of Shelley's character and intellectual interests, necessary to do so: Shelley was first and foremost reformer and rebel. The Italian exile and his poetry therein written in no way deny his ruling passion to improve in so far as he could the miserable human lot. When active participation in the English struggle for social reform was denied him he worked to the same end in other ways.

In a letter to Peacock of August 16, Shelley says that Ollier will send proofs of a "little poem," this being *Rosalind and Helen* not published until the next spring, 1819. It had been begun in 1817 and Shelley had finished it at the Baths of Lucca in 1818. It is well, therefore, to consider it now for whatever light it throws on Shelley's thought at a time immediately prior to the composition of *Prometheus Unbound*. This indeed is not much. It is a personal poem and the incidents at which it clearly hints are in part those of Mary Shelley's early friendship with Isabel Baxter and the alienation of that friendship through Isabel's husband, David Booth. Two letters to William Baxter, father of Isabel, dated December 10, and December 30, 1817, together with Mr. Ingpen's notes thereto, give the essential

facts of the estrangement. As Booth was a friend of Godwin's the reader suspects Godwin to have been the cause of the breach, for Baxter, who evidently liked Shelley, was forced by his implacable son-in-law to cease correspondence with him. Booth's dislike of Shelley was not apparently due to disapproval of his radical ideas but of his supposed morals and these, one infers, as interpreted by Godwin at the time of Shelley's elopement with Mary. The loss of her girlhood friend caused Mrs. Shelley pain, and Shelley, who had become accustomed to public odium and hostility, was likewise hurt by the coldness and weakness of Baxter. Though armored against public disapproval, Shelley was not proof to the barbs of private malice. The Baxter incident and later the Hoppner episode wounded him deeply.

*Rosalind and Helen* tells of the meeting after years of alienation of two women, widows both. Rosalind evidently is Isabel, Helen is Mary. They are reconciled and tell their tragic histories. Rosalind, after an unhappy marriage, is robbed by her husband's will of her older children. Helen, united to a radical and reformer, is left widowed with a son. In the slight story there are many correspondences with the actual stories of Isabel and Mary. But the story includes also a fanciful future for both and the characterizations of the husbands are a poetical rendition of Shelley's conception of David Booth, and, presumably, of himself. In a work of imagination built upon known relationships it is, however, extremely difficult to dissociate fact from fancy, or to determine what is true characterization and what a poetical interpretation of character, or what, indeed, is wish-fulfilment. Booth, in Shelley's interpretation of him, was hard, calculating, and cold, which reading of him seems to be borne out by a letter written Shelley by Booth and cited by Ingpen in the Shelley letters (Vol. II, p. 579). Booth may have been, however, no such monster as depicted in the poem nor is it perhaps fair to suppose that Shelley thought him so any more than he consciously depicted himself as the reformer husband of Helen. The latter may very well be a self-idealization, the portrait of what he would like to be, as, similarly, in his portrayal of Laon. In both the reader may concede a degree of wish-fulfilment. In a number of instances in his poems Shelley dramatizes himself as reformer and martyr, as achieving in the world of events some adequate expression of his powers and suffering a martyrdom greater than he actually experienced. His, it must be remembered, was a singularly frustrated life. He had no reason to believe that he had made any impress whatsoever upon the

world. The imaginary portrait of David Booth may be, then, no more than a personification of all the hardness and coldness, the denial of trust and love in life, which Shelley had experienced in the instances of half a dozen friends whom he had trusted and found wanting.

There is in all this personal suffering which Shelley underwent and in the effects of it upon his imaginings no doubt an element of the pathological. Shelley, by the force of circumstance and the defects and virtues of his own nature, led a tragic life, a life which gave him insight into the darkness of the human heart. Coldness, selfishness, and cruelty he found more prevalent than love. To one whose heart went out in loving sympathy to all things, the realization of its weakness, of its loneliness against odds too great for it, was bewildering, shattering. Shelley for a time indulged in self-pity and got some consolation in creating characters which are himself enlarged, more successful in the rôle of his choice, that of poet-reformer, and suffering a greater and more spectacular martyrdom. It is evidence of his greatness of character that he did not rest at this point and spend the remainder of his days in a lyric morass of self-pity. He achieves ultimately a greater impersonality, perceiving in his own sufferings but an instance of the law exemplified on the heroic plane by Christ and Prometheus, that those who give the most and love the world unselfishly suffer the most from the world's neglect and cruelty. Shelley when he wrote *Rosalind and Helen* at the age of twenty-five indulged somewhat in self-pity. It would be surprising had he not. Yet within two years he had achieved the tragic greatness and impersonality of *Prometheus Unbound*. Even so, the lofty detachment of that masterpiece does not later prevent him from moments of self-indulgent pity as, for instance, in *Adonais*. But it is asking a good deal of a young man to retain, having once achieved it, the impersonality and detachment of the sublime. Shelley, being human and weak and desirous of understanding and love, relaxed. Even so, the lyric lament for self, the cry of merely personal suffering, grows fainter as he matures. There was in him the greatness of the artist, that detachment which can make the lyrical expression of his own emotions something which is impersonal and objective, the voice of all who have felt as he but have not his gift of expression.

Shelley's social philosophy as evidenced in the poem is no different from that of *The Revolt of Islam*. There are the familiar denunciations of bigotry, greed, and tyranny, of hardness of heart; and there is hope, no longer sanguine, of a better day to be. But these evidences of Shelley's radicalism do not assume so large a place as in his earlier

narrative poems and there is more of sheer lyrical beauty in the descriptions of nature and in the easy management of verse, which metrically suggests the seeming-casual loveliness of *Christabel*. Shelley set no great store by any of his work done in this genre, yet his best examples of it such as *Julian and Maddalo* and *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* have an ease and naturalness combined with felicity of phrase and flexibility of meter which are anticipatory of much of the best of modern verse—an indebtedness not sufficiently acknowledged. *Rosalind and Helen* is thus better poetry than *The Revolt of Islam* and marks an enlargement of Shelley's poetic craftsmanship. But for the same reasons that Shelley dismissed it as of small importance it need not be further discussed in the history of Shelley's ideas. Mary Shelley writes of it, "Shelley had no care for any of his poems that did not emanate from the depths of his mind, and develop some high or abstruse truth." The quotation supports the contention of this book that Shelley was rebel, reformer, and thinker who happened incidentally to be a poet. If we approach him as a thinker and endeavor to trace the history of his ideas, his poetry becomes more intelligible, is indeed intelligible only if so approached.

It is appropriate in this place to consider those translations of Plato with which Shelley occupied himself during the first months of his Italian residence. Plato, and as is apparent from the internal evidence of *The Witch of Atlas* and *Prometheus Unbound*, the neo-Platonists, had a great influence on Shelley's thought, especially that of his last four years. As has already been remarked from an examination of his letters and his prose, the development of his mind was away from materialism and necessitarianism towards mysticism; or, if the term mysticism is too vague, his development may be defined as marked by a weakening faith in the sole adequacy of reason and an increased reliance upon intuition. In determining this change the dialogues of Plato are clearly one of the important forces. The philosophical symbols which he adapted to his poetry Shelley derives seemingly from Proclus and Plotinus, the animating spirit largely from Plato; though thus to discriminate is somewhat hazardous, for the distinction to be drawn between the Platonic and neo-Platonic influences is exceedingly difficult. Shelley's knowledge of the neo-Platonists is largely a matter of inference. His knowledge and love of Plato is shown by the repeated statements of his letters and by his translations.

Of these, the translation of *The Banquet* is chief. In his preface to it Shelley writes, "The dialogue entitled 'The Banquet' was selected by the translator as the most beautiful and perfect among all the



works of Plato." To this statement he appends a note: "The Republic, though replete with considerable errors of speculation, is, indeed, the greatest repository of important truths of all the works of Plato." This priority Shelley accords seemingly because *The Republic* is concerned with political and social problems whose philosophical interest was, to Shelley, paramount. *The Republic* is, however, so long a work that Shelley translated only a few passages of it. *The Banquet* remains his best example of a translation of Greek prose, though Shelley declares he does no more "than present an imperfect shadow of the language and the sentiment of this astonishing production." The apology is undoubtedly overmodest. Whether Shelley is true in every detail to his original I am not qualified to say, but the ease, grace, and felicity of the translation indicate a complete mastery of the task. Certainly it is regrettable that Shelley did not translate the whole of the Platonic dialogues, for his appreciation of Plato was both discriminating and profound. "Plato exhibits," Shelley writes, "the rare union of close and subtle logic, with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendour and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions, which hurry the persuasions onward as in a breathless career." He goes on to say in words peculiarly significant of his own mental development: "His views into the nature of mind and existence are often obscure, only because they are profound... there is scarcely any of his treatises, which do not, however stained by puerile sophisms, contain the most remarkable intuitions into all that can be the subject of the human mind. His excellence consists especially in intuition, and it is this faculty which raises him far above Aristotle, whose genius though vivid and various, is obscure in comparison with that of Plato."

This open avowal of the superiority of intuition to the reason is a most important event in Shelley's mental history. Intimations of this trend have been evident earlier, but by this statement he puts himself unmistakably on the side of the mystics or intuitionists and frees himself from the domination of the scientific rationalists whom he had once followed. The effect upon his metaphysics, his poetry, and upon his scientific beliefs is inevitably profound. Of *The Banquet* itself, which Shelley so greatly admired, it is impossible to determine with certainty what parts most influenced him. I shall, however, quote those passages which seem to me, in the light of Shelley's subsequent poetry, the most significant. The distinction between the two Loves, the Uranian and the Pandemian Venus, which Plato draws is

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among these, for evidence of Shelley's interest in both is to be found in *Prometheus Unbound* and in *The Witch of Atlas*: "I will endeavor to distinguish which is the Love whom it becomes us to praise, and having thus discriminated one from the other, will attempt to render him who is the subject of our discourse the honour due to his divinity. We all know that Venus is never without Love; and if Venus were one, Love would be one; but since there are two Venuses, of necessity also must there be two Loves. For assuredly are there two Venuses; one, the eldest, the daughter of Uranus, born without a mother, whom we call the Uranian; the other younger, the daughter of Jupiter and Dione, whom we call the Pandemian;—of necessity must there also be two Loves, the Uranian and Pandemian companions of those goddesses." The Pandemian Love is of the flesh, "But the attendant on the other, the Uranian . . . is the Love who inspires us with affection, and exempts us from all wantonness and libertinism. Those who are inspired by this divinity seek the affections of those who are endowed by nature with greater excellence and vigour both of body and mind. And it is easy to distinguish those who especially exist under the influence of this power, by their choosing in early youth as the objects of their love those in whom the intellectual faculties have begun to develope. . . . That Pandemic lover who loves rather the body than the soul is worthless, nor can be constant and consistent, since he has placed his affections on that which has no stability."

This doctrine of the two Loves, the sensual and the intellectual, is more fully expounded by the neo-Platonists. The intellectual Love is the attribute of Deity, of the One in whom exists the perfect Love, Truth, and Beauty to which the soul aspires. Earthly Love is but the shadow of the Divine Love, its material or sensuous manifestation in the world of created things. Intellectual Beauty, which Shelley celebrates in his poem, is identical with this Divine Love, the unappeasable desire for which impels the soul to escape the world of sense and return as soon as it can to its origin and home, the world of archetypes or ideas. The duality of love in its heavenly and in its earthly manifestations is implicit in the personification of love in the *Witch of Atlas* and in Asia of *Prometheus Unbound*. Therein myth and the interpretation of myth by neo-Platonism is utilized to supplement the discussion of love to be found in *The Banquet*.

Several other passages in *The Banquet* are significant also in Shelley's philosophy. Thus the passage which relates the functions of the physician in relation to love: "He ought to make those things which are most inimical, friendly, and excite them to mutual love.

But those things are most inimical which are most opposite to each other; cold to heat, bitterness to sweetness, dryness to moisture. Our progenitor, Æsculapius, as the poets inform us (and indeed I believe them,) through the skill which he possessed to inspire love and concord in these contending principles, established the science of medicine." Love, in this conception, is a reconciler of opposites, a harmonizer both of things spiritual and physical. It is from such a theory evidently, with the addition of scientific speculation which, from the time of Newton to Shelley's, sought to find a single unifying principle in nature, whether the ether or electricity, that Shelley derives his notion of love as both a physical and spiritual force. In *Prometheus Unbound* love is identified with electricity; and in *The Witch of Atlas*, magnetism, which is either identical with or similar to electricity, is both the physical and psychical agent of the Witch, who is identifiable with love, whether in its Pandemian or physical aspect or in its Uranian or spiritual aspect. Both Platonism and science are seeking thus a single unifying principle whether thought of as love or force or the two as one.

In another passage of *The Banquet*, love, the unifying and reconciling principle, is likened to music, which brings harmony out of discord: "Music is then the knowledge of that which relates to love in harmony and system. In the very system of harmony and rhythm, it is easy to distinguish love. The double love is not distinguishable in music itself; but it is required to apply it to the service of mankind by system and harmony, which is called poetry, or the composition of melody; or by the correct use of songs and measures already composed, which is called discipline; then one can be distinguished from the other, by the aid of an extremely skilful artist. And the better love ought to be honoured and preserved for the sake of those who are virtuous, and that the nature of the vicious may be changed through the inspiration of its spirit. This is that beautiful Uranian love, the attendant on the Uranian muse: the Pandemian is the attendant of Polyhymnia; to whose influence we should only so far subject ourselves, as to derive pleasure from it without indulging to excess." This conception finds its echo in *Prometheus Unbound* when after the triumph of Prometheus the rhythm and harmony of the universe is stressed and earth and moon are reconciled in antiphonal song. Likewise is disharmony in the seasons due to the lack of the unifying love: "Even the constitution of the seasons of the year is penetrated with these contending principles. For so often as heat and cold, dryness and moisture, of which I spoke before, are influenced

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by the more benignant love, and are harmoniously and temperately intermingled with the seasons, they bring maturity and health to men, and to all the other animals and plants. But when the evil and injurious love assumes the dominion of the seasons of the year, destruction is spread widely abroad." These ideas likewise find their echo in *Prometheus Unbound*, wherein, during the reign of Jupiter, evil prevails and Nature poisons her children; and again in *The Witch of Atlas* when the Witch is driven to her fountain in the dark of the moon or in the storms of winter. Love, the harmonizing principle of life, is thus variously defined in its dominion or its defeat, a principle extending through both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

Shelley's interest in affinities and in the hermaphrodite, symbol of perfect union, has its evident origin in *The Banquet*: "First, then, human beings were formerly not divided into two sexes, male and female; there was also a third, common to both the others, the name of which remains, though the sex itself has disappeared. The androgynous sex, both in appearance and in name, was common both to male and female. . . . We account for the production of three sexes by supposing that, at the beginning, the male was produced from the sun, the female from the earth; and that sex which participated in both sexes, from the moon, by reason of the androgynous nature of the moon." The last statement has peculiar significance in relation to the Hermaphrodite created by the Witch in the *Witch of Atlas*. The Witch is clearly to be identified in many of her functions with Isis or Diana. The Hermaphrodite, symbolizing the duality of sex and likewise the duality of physical forces, is properly, therefore, her creation.

The doctrine of the separateness of the sexes implies the imperfection of the individual and the search for the affinity, his other half: "Every one of us is thus the half of what may be properly termed a man, and like a pselta cut in two, is the imperfect portion of an entire whole, perpetually necessitated to seek the half belonging to him. . . . Whenever, therefore, any such as I have described are impetuously struck, through the sentiment of their former union, with love and desire and the want of community, they are unwilling to be divided even for a moment. These are they who devote their whole lives to each other, with a vain and inexpressible longing to obtain from each other something they know not what; for it is not merely the sensual delights of their intercourse for the sake of which they dedicate themselves to each other with such serious affection; but the soul of each manifestly thirsts for, from the other, something

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which there are no words to describe, and divines that which it seeks, and traces obscurely the footsteps of its obscure desire." Should Vulcan ask us, "Do you not desire the closest union and singleness to exist between you, so that you may never be divided night or day? If so, I will melt you together, and make you grow into one, so that both in life and death ye may be undivided. Consider is this what you desire? Will it content you if you become that which I propose?" We all know that no one would refuse such an offer, but would at once feel that this was what he had ever sought; and intimately to mix and melt and to be melted together with his beloved, so that one should be made out of two. The cause of this desire is, that according to our original nature, we were once entire. The desire and the pursuit of integrity and union is that which we all love." In Shelley's poetry *Epipsychidion* is the most obvious expression of the soul's desire for its mate. But indeed the idea is pervasive in Shelley; the veiled maids and ladies of the garden are the personifications of affinities in which sexual completeness is identified with the attainment of intellectual beauty, the perfection of the individual demanding both the union with his soul-mate and his return to the realm of ideas in reconciliation with the One.

There are numerous passages in *The Banquet* whose precise germinal value in Shelley's thought cannot be weighed but may be made the theme of speculation. Love it is said in the process of the debate is not the oldest but the youngest of the gods. "Those ancient deeds among the Gods recorded by Hesiod and Parmenides, if their relations are to be considered as true, were produced not by Love, but by Necessity. For if Love had been then in Heaven, those violent and sanguinary crimes never would have taken place; but there would ever have subsisted that affection and peace, in which the Gods now live, under the influence of Love.... At the origin of things, as I have before said, many fearful deeds are reported to have been done among the Gods, on account of the dominion of Necessity. But so soon as this deity sprang forth from the desire which forever tends in the universe towards that which is lovely, then all blessings descended upon all living things, human and divine." Does the central theme of *Prometheus Unbound* derive from this passage? Jupiter, it will be recalled from that drama, seeks to enslave humanity and to make Necessity in the person of Demogorgon a slave to this end. Prometheus, having rid himself of hate, triumphs over Jupiter, and Demogorgon bears Jupiter from his throne. Everything, says Demogorgon, is subject to Eternal Love personified in Prometheus. Love is

thus made victorious over evil, and Necessity, personified in Demogorgon, performs the bidding of Prometheus. The allegory is intelligible in terms of the passage quoted from *The Banquet*, and although I arrived at my interpretation of it by a different road it seems highly probable that this central point of the drama, its metaphysical kernel so to speak, derives from Plato, though in its elaboration drawing also from other philosophical sources, from science and from neo-Platonism.

Pertinent to *The Witch of Atlas*, in which the patroness of the arts and the healer of the sick is to be identified with Isis and Minerva, is a passage in *The Banquet* ascribing to Love the inspiration of poetry, medicine, and divination: "Is it not evident that Love was the author of all the arts of life with which we are acquainted, and that he whose teacher has been Love, becomes eminent and illustrious, whilst he who knows not Love, remains forever unregarded and obscure? Apollo invented medicine, and divination, and archery, under the guidance of desire and Love; so that Apollo was the disciple of Love. Through him the Muses discovered the arts of literature, and Vulcan that of moulding brass, and Minerva the loom, and Jupiter the mystery of the dominion which he now exercises over gods and men. So were the Gods taught and disciplined by the love of that which is beautiful, for there is no love towards deformity." The resemblance of these activities ascribed to Love to the activities of the Witch is close. That the Witch is Love in manifestations both earthly and heavenly is I believe certain, though in the elaboration of her rôle Shelley employs myths pertaining to Venus, Isis, and Minerva, a mythology only hinted at in the passage from "The Banquet." Here again, therefore, it is impossible to say that Plato was the sole inspiration of the poem, though evident, I think, that Shelley had the passage in mind when he devised the Witch and described her home and her activities.

A few other citations enforce the resemblance of Love as described in *The Banquet* to the Witch of Shelley's poem. Diotima in explaining Love declares that Love is "a great daemon, Socrates; and everything daemonic holds an intermediate place between what is divine and what is mortal." Love is an intermediary between gods and men, the rôle in myth filled by Isis or Diana, goddess of the moon. For the moon is the residence of the soul, which is intermediary between mind, which is divine, and body, which is mortal. So the complicated symbolism of the myths is explained by neo-Platonism in its fuller rationalization of the hints and suggestions in Plato. In Plato's terminology the intermediary between gods and men is called a daemon.

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Witch, daemon, goddess, the term is of no especial importance provided the intermediary functions of the rôle are apparent. It may be remarked in passing that Shelley entitled his revision of *Queen Mab*, *The Daemon of the World*. Queen Mab or the Fairy can with equal propriety be called Witch, Daemon, or Goddess. Under any name she is Love and Intellectual Beauty and her rôle, however elaborated by myth and neo-Platonic interpretations, is intelligible in the light of Plato's discussion.

In his *Defence of Poetry* Shelley in the definition of the poet and the poet's function draws upon a sentence in *The Banquet* which defines poetry in its broadest sense: "Poetry; which is a general name signifying every cause whereby anything proceeds from that which is not, into that which is; so that the exercise of every inventive art is poetry, and all such artists poets." Poetry is, therefore, creation; and so Love likewise is more than the desire for individual possession. "Love, then, is collectively the desire in men that good should be for ever present to them." The words are Diotima's and to them Socrates agrees. She proceeds to elaborate the argument and concludes: "It necessarily, from what has been confessed, follows that we must desire immortality together with what is good, since Love is the desire that good be for ever present to us. Of necessity Love must also be the desire of immortality." How influential such an argument may have been with Shelley in resolving his doubts as to personal immortality cannot be determined. Shelley's opinions upon the question have been thus far, as has been shown, various. There are many further expressions yet to be remarked. It can at least be averred that the Platonic acceptance of immortality kept Shelley in his maturity from dogmatic denial of it.

The temptation to quote interminably from Shelley's translation of one of the most beautiful of the Platonic dialogues must be resisted. I shall quote only a little more, those lines in which Diotima defines beauty in its various forms, a passage which was the evident inspiration of Plotinus in his celebrated essay *On The Beautiful* and which, however derived by him, Keats, no less than Shelley, made a part of his religion: "He who aspires to love rightly, ought from his earliest youth to seek an intercourse with beautiful forms, and first to make a single form the object of his love, and therein to generate intellectual excellences. He ought, then, to consider that beauty in whatever form it resides is the brother of that beauty which subsists in another form; and if he ought to pursue that which is beautiful in form it would be absurd to imagine that beauty is not one and the

same thing in all forms, and would therefore remit much of his ardent preference towards one, through his perception of the multitude of claims upon his love. In addition, he would consider the beauty which is in souls more excellent than that which is in form. So that one endowed with an admirable soul even though the flower of the form were withered, would suffice him as the object of his love and care, and the companion with whom he might seek and produce such conclusions as tend to the improvement of youth; so that it might be led to observe the beauty and the conformity which there is in the observation of its duties and the laws, and to esteem little the mere beauty of the outward form. He would then conduct his pupil to science, so that he might look upon the loveliness of wisdom; and that contemplating thus the universal beauty, no longer would he unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form in love, nor one subject of discipline or science, but would turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty, and from the sight of the lovely and majestic forms which it contains, would abundantly bring forth his conceptions in philosophy; until, strengthened and confirmed, he should at length steadily contemplate one science, which is the science of this universal beauty."

Shelley's fondness for the *Ion* is less explicable than for *The Banquet*. He went, however, to the pains of translating it. Nor is it impossible that he was amused by Socrates' definition of the poet's function and the madness attendant on its exercise. Socrates seems to be spoofing the rhapsodist Ion, who is, of course, not a poet at all but an elocutionist and, as it appears, has no great understanding of Homer whose poetry he recites. Plato, it is reasonable to believe, is kidding all those who suppose poetry the product of a divine frenzy. Shakespeare, it will be recalled, permits Theseus to make an ass of himself to somewhat the same effect. The excellence of Theseus' delusions on this subject lies in their approximations to truth. For indeed both Theseus and Socrates are endeavoring to explain the miracle of imagination which, being subject to no rational explanation, can be defined only by analogy and hyperbole. "It is better both for you and for us, O Ion," Socrates concludes, "to say that you are the inspired, and not the learned, eulogist of Homer." Unfortunately eulogists of poets have too seldom taken the implication to heart.

One passage of the dialogue, that descriptive of the creative process—or allegedly so, for Socrates it is clear is fooling Ion to the top of his bent—contains a figure which is the origin of a passage in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and should therefore be cited with sufficient



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of its context: "For the authors of those great poems which we admire, do not attain to excellence through the rules of any art, but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, *possessed* by a spirit not their own. . . . For the souls of the poets, as poets tell us, have this peculiar ministration in the world. They tell us that these souls, flying like bees from flower to flower, and wandering over the gardens and the meadows, and the honey-flowing fountains of the Muses, return to us laden with the sweetness of melody, and arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination, they speak truth. For a poet is indeed a thing aetherially light, winged, and sacred, nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired and as it were mad, or whilst any reason remains in him. For whilst a man retains any portion of the thing called reason, he is utterly incompetent to produce poetry, or to vaticinate. . . . The God seems purposely to have deprived all poets, prophets, and soothsayers of every particle of reason and understanding, the better to adapt them to their employment as his ministers and interpreters; and that we, their auditors, may acknowledge that those who write so beautifully, are possessed, and address us, inspired by the God." The truth concealed within the husk of exaggeration which only is fit for Ion's consumption is more soberly put in the lines in *Prometheus Unbound* descriptive of the poet's contemplation of

The yellow bees i' the ivy bloom—  
Nor heed nor see what things they be;  
But from these create he can  
Forms more real than living man,  
Nurselings of immortality!

Shelley translated also portions of *Menexenus* and *The Republic*. As to the first perhaps he shared Socrates' tastes, for Menexenus remarks, "Thou always laughest at the orators, O Socrates." The fragments of *The Republic* are too few to throw much light upon Shelley's reason for translating them. Two have to do with the necessity of moral beauty and good taste in art lest it prove a bad influence on the young. Another passage has to do with the evil of a belief in hell, and last there is one which has possibly considerable significance: "God then, since he is good, cannot be, as is vulgarly supposed, the cause of all things; he is the cause, indeed, of very few things. Among the great variety of events which happen in the course of human affairs, evil prodigiously over-balances good in everything which re-

gards men. Of all that is good there can be no other cause than God; but some other cause ought to be discovered for evil, which should never be imputed as an effect to God." Shelley's concern with the problem of good and evil is abundantly evident in *Prometheus Unbound*, wherein he considers the possibility of a limited and evolving God, a God seeking to master the universe in which an evil alien to him exists. The passage cited hints at such as one of several possible explanations for the duality of things.

There are further two brief fragments, one from the *Crito*, the other a comment by Shelley on the Daemon of Socrates. The first appealed to Shelley I think because it anticipates the ethics of Christ in its resolve to return good for evil. The important sentence is: "Although you have inflicted an injustice on me, which is sufficient, according to the opinions of the multitude, to authorize me to consider you and me as in a state of warfare; yet, had I the power, so far from inflicting any revenge, I would endeavor to overcome you by benefits." Shelley's note on the Daemon of Socrates has, I believe, considerable significance as intimating his concern with the problem of determinism and free will. It is brief and I give it entire: "Socrates made a distinction between things subject to divination and those not subject to it. He said—a supernatural force has sway over the greatest things in all human undertakings and that the uncertainty belonging to them all, is the introduction of that power, or rather that all events except those which the human will modifies, are modified by the divine will." The implications of this idea will be apparent in the later discussion of *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley had planned "A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients Relative to the Subject of Love." A fragment of this essay is extant which reveals his great admiration for Greek civilization at its highest and his equal sense of its failure in that it subjected women to an inferior place. "The study of modern history is the study of kings, financiers, statesmen, and priests. The history of ancient Greece is the study of legislators, philosophers, and poets; it is the history of men, compared with the history of titles. What the Greeks were, was a reality, not a promise. And what we are and hope to be, is derived, as it were, from the influence and inspiration of these glorious generations." Nevertheless the modern world has in one respect surpassed the Greeks, that is in improving the status of women: "The modern Europeans have in this circumstance, and in the abolition of slavery, made an improvement the most decisive in the regulation of human society; and all the virtue and the wisdom of the Periclean age arose

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under other institutions, in spite of the diminution which personal slavery and the inferiority of women, recognized by law and opinion, must have produced in the delicacy, the strength, the comprehensiveness, and the accuracy of their conceptions, in moral, political, and metaphysical science, and perhaps in every other art and science."

It is difficult to determine the exact extent of Shelley's indebtedness to Plato. The excerpts which I have quoted are necessarily few and these selected from Shelley's fragmentary translations. The debt is, of course, far greater than these would indicate. Of his indebtedness to the neo-Platonists we have only the internal evidence of certain poems, especially *The Witch of Atlas* and *Prometheus Unbound*. There exist no translations in his work of anything from Plotinus or Proclus. It is probable, indeed, that he read them in translation. The poetic symbols which he employed based on neo-Platonic usage came pretty certainly by way of Thomas Taylor and are to be found more in the commentaries upon the neo-Platonists than in their own direct usage. The problem here is for some specialist in the neo-Platonic philosophy or some student of Taylor. Happily an exact weighing of values, influences, and sources is not vital, though useful, in an interpretation of Shelley's philosophy or in following the development of his mind. The general course of his intellectual history is clear enough, his progress from a scientific determinism to a mysticism derived from Plato and the commentators on Plato. The essential thing is that he came to perceive the inadequacy of reason to the discovery of truth, to the apprehension of the divine reality. It was the teaching both of Plato and the neo-Platonists that the "deep truth" is felt only by the intuition. There is in this belief no denial of reason. Reason indeed is stressed. It is an invaluable tool but no more. It moves at the command of that deeper apprehension of reality which is arrived at by intuition. Kant comes to the same conclusion, though employing a different terminology.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Poetic Response to Italy*



THE eighteen months comprising the latter half of 1818 and the year 1819 are probably the most fertile period of Shelley's poetic life. On the poetry he wrote in those months his reputation could safely stand. Yet in this brief period he traveled considerably about Italy, visiting Florence, Naples, Venice, Rome, and lesser cities; knew deep grief in the death of his and Mary's two children, Clara and William; and in this and in ill-health, in the melancholy of exile and despair of human liberty knew suffering whose poignancy is all but unperceived in the beauty in which it found expression. His own statement that poets "learn in suffering what they teach in song" could ask no better illustration of its truth. Indeed to look a little into the tragedy of his life, to perceive at what cost to him his poetry was bought, is to ask whether any beauty is justified of so great a price. No doubt the same may be said of many creations of genius and of lesser works made by humbler men, whose cost is little appreciated by those who profit by them. Shelley's case is peculiar only in the singular lack of sympathy and understanding with which his life and work are attended. Most readers forget the human tragedy which lies back of the poetry, partly because the poetry is so beautiful and partly because Shelley himself is so little understood. Keats evokes a far greater pity in the hearts of mankind. Yet his suffering was less than Shelley's, less in range, in duration, and, I believe in intensity, for his nature was no more sensitive. His suffering was, indeed, for the most part personal whereas Shelley's was very largely born of the world's misery which he felt so profoundly and yet was powerless to assuage.

Two reasons may be ascribed for the richness of Shelley's poetic activity in the first year and a half of his Italian stay. For one, he felt acutely in his exile his inability to take part in the political and social activity in England which was preparing the way for the Reform Bill of 1832. His primary concern was, as always, for social betterment, which during his English years he had done his best to assist. The writing of poetry was the sublimation of a thwarted desire whose intensity may be judged by the quantity and the character of the poetry itself. A second reason for the creative fertility of this time was the esthetic awakening which he experienced. Not only the

natural scenery of Italy, of which his letters are full, quickened his sense of beauty, but the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture burst upon him like a revelation. I do not, I think, exaggerate in that statement. Shelley's references to the arts, whether in his verse or in his letters, are singularly few before the Italian years. Music he had come to appreciate a little under the tutelage of Peacock. It is singular, until one remembers how little time, freedom, and opportunity he had, while in England, to develop a taste and appreciation for the arts, how uneducated esthetically he was when he came to Italy. If his letters thereafter read too much like tourist rhapsodies sired by Baedeker from some Guide to the Italian Galleries, the reason is obvious. Shelley was enthusiastic. He had never before seen such pictures, statues, and ancient buildings. The miserable human race, doubly miserable in the persons of the latter-day Italians living uninfluenced amid the relics of such beauty, was capable of artistic expression he had never conceived possible. How greatly the race had fallen off from the giants of the past! Yet how great were human potentialities! He despaired but he also dreamed.

I have no intention of quoting too extensively from the long letters to Peacock which are the chief record of Shelley's Italian travels. But some excerpts are necessary to show sufficiently the subjects which interested him, especially when, as in many cases, the observations recorded in the letters find recognizable expression also in the poems. I have no doubt that a minuter examination of the letters and poems than I shall make would reveal many little correspondences. Temples which he admired and described in detail were the originals of the temples described in *Prometheus*; paintings and sculptures suggested the charioteers of the various cars which bear the deities and the hours; Christ in his dreadful agony as pictured in *Prometheus* is described from the innumerable paintings of the crucifixion which filled the art galleries he had explored. Some little citation, then, is illuminating, showing superficially the way of the creative process in a sensitive and poetic mind.

Writing to Peacock, October 8, 1818, from Este, Shelley tells of his meeting Byron in Venice whither Shelley had gone in Clare Clairmont's behalf to ask that she be permitted to see her daughter, Allegra: "I saw Lord Byron, and really hardly knew him again; he is changed into the liveliest and happiest-looking man I ever met. He read me the first canto of his 'Don Juan'—a thing in the style of 'Beppo' but infinitely better, and dedicated to Southey, in ten or a dozen stanzas, more like a mixture of wormwood and verdigrease than satire." He

proceeds to a description of Venice and some of its glories, characteristically dwelling on the dungeons of the Doge's palace, a symbol of human cruelty. "When the French came here, they found only one old man in the dungeons, and he could not speak. But Venice, which was once a tyrant, is now the next worse thing, a slave; for in fact it ceased to be free or worth our regret as a nation, from the moment that the oligarchy usurped the rights of the people. Yet, I do not imagine that it was ever so degraded as it has been since the French, and especially the Austrian yoke. The Austrians take sixty per cent in taxes, and impose free quarters on the inhabitants. A horde of German soldiers, as vicious and more disgusting than the Venetians themselves, insult these miserable people. I had no conception of the excess to which avarice, cowardice, superstition, ignorance, passionless lust, and all the inexpressible brutalities which degrade human nature, could be carried, until I had passed a few days in Venice." A few lines later, in the next paragraph, he writes, "We see before us the wide flat plains of Lombardy, in which we see the sun and moon rise and set, and the evening star, and all the golden magnificence of autumnal clouds." It is of this contrast of natural beauty and human degradation that the *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* was composed. And the letter ends with another turn characteristic of Shelley: "I have just read Malthus in a French translation. Malthus is a very clever man, and the world would be a great gainer if it would seriously take his lesson into consideration, if it were capable of attending seriously to anything but mischief—but what on earth does he mean by some of his inferences?"

A long letter of November 6-7 to Peacock describes a visit to Tasso's prison in Ferrara and the relics of the poet there preserved. Shelley discourses upon Tasso's handwriting and the character of man it suggests. But it is an incidental remark which he makes in connection with the analysis that gives the passage its interest: "You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object." This bit of self-revelation is profoundly true of Shelley and significant of the character of his poetic genius. It, together with the bee passage in *Prometheus* suggested by "The Banquet," reveals the philosophic character of his genius and its native aptitude for mysticism. The world of the actual is not enough, for the physical phenomena of the universe are manifestations of law, of an inner purposive reality. It is the business of philosopher and poet to infer from the shadow—the "actual"—the reality which lies back of it. This is true of all art. The reproduction

of the actual is not truly realism. Actualism would be a better word for it, and however ingenious and painstaking it may be, such photography, though useful in its kind, is unworthy the designation of art. Shelley's belief in such an esthetic creed does not at all warrant the foolish belief that he dwelt in a cloudland of fancy. Far from it. He had a good eye for fact and saw the actual world without illusion. He saw also that the actual world does not constitute the whole; saw truly, as did the Platonists, that the world of the actual is a mutable world, a world of flux. The world of the real is the archetypal world of ideas to which the factual world is shadow; but the factual world is suggestive, to the seeing eye, of the reality back of it.

A letter to Peacock of November 9 is descriptive of paintings which Shelley had seen in Bologna. These, which were largely of religious subjects, Shelley viewed with mixed feelings, approving the execution and disliking the idea expressed: "There is a Murder of the Innocents, also, by Guido, finely colored, with much expression—but the subject is very horrible, and it seemed deficient in strength—at least, you require the highest ideal energy, the most poetical and exalted conception of the subject, to reconcile you to such a contemplation. There was a Jesus Christ crucified, by the same, very fine. One gets tired, indeed, whatever may be the conception and execution of it, of seeing that monotonous and agonized form for ever exhibited in one prescriptive attitude of torture." In the instance of another picture he expresses his abhorrence of monastic masochism: "It was the representation of the founder of the Carthusians exercising his austerities in the desert, with a youth as his attendant, kneeling beside him at an altar; on another altar stood a skull and a crucifix; and around were the rocks and the trees of the wilderness. I never saw such a figure as this fellow. His face was wrinkled like a dried snake's skin, and drawn in long hard lines; his very hands were wrinkled. He looked like an animated mummy. He was clothed in a loose dress of death-coloured flannel, such as you might fancy a shroud might be, after it had wrapped a corpse a month or two. It had a yellow putrid hue, which it cast on all the objects around, so that the hands and face of the Carthusian and his companion were jaundiced by this sepulchral glimmer. Why write books against religion when we may hang up such pictures? But the world either will not or cannot see."

Shelley is moved to philosophizing by the evanescence of paintings as compared to the durability of sculptures and the virtual immortality of books. He draws this consolation from the perishability of painting: "There is one refuge from the despondency of this con-

templation. The material part, indeed, of their works must perish, but they survive in the mind of man, and the remembrances connected with them are transmitted from generation to generation. The poet embodies them in his creations; the systems of philosophers are modelled to gentleness by their contemplation; opinion, that legislator, is infected with their influence; men become better and wiser; and the unseen seeds are perhaps thus sown which shall produce a plant more excellent even than that from which they fell." There is in this, as indeed in all Shelley's comments on paintings, no evidence that he had any perception of the abstract esthetics of a picture, its formal design. A picture to him was, as to most, a portrait, a scene, or a story. The subject matter and the grace of the execution were the theme of his interest. He could not, as would Mr. Roger Fry, abstract the principles of form from the subject matter. No doubt it would have been extraordinary could he have done so considering his small knowledge of paintings and of painters. Yet in the instances of sculpture and architecture he seems to have had, as will appear, an almost intuitive sense of form and technic. For one untrained in these arts his observations are extraordinarily acute. Whether it was the religious character of so many of the paintings which repelled him and made it impossible for his esthetic sense to regard them abstractly, or whether the sculpture and architecture, being for the most part pagan and classical in character, struck a responsive chord in one versed in Greek literature and philosophy, it is not easy to say. The fact remains for some student of esthetics to ponder and explain.

A letter to Leigh Hunt of December 22, written from Naples, is of considerable personal interest. Shelley was at this time in bad health, suffering much pain. The *Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples* are the evidence of his state of mind. There was little in the success of his literary efforts to cheer him. He writes: "I saw the *Quarterly* at Venice, and was much pleased with the Review of 'Frankenstein' though it distorts the story. As to what relates to yourself and me, it makes me melancholy to consider the dreadful wickedness of heart which could have prompted such expressions as those with which the anonymous writer exults over my domestic calamities, and the perversion of understanding with which he paints your character. There can be no doubt with respect to me, that personal hatred is intermingled with the rage of faction. I know that Southey on one occasion said to a friend of his that he on his own knowledge knew me to be the *blackest of villains*. When we consider *who* makes this accusation, and against *whom* I need only rebut such



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an accusation by silence and a smile. . . . As far as the public is concerned, it is not for him whom Southey accuses, but for him whom all the wise and good among his contemporaries accuse of delinquency to all public faith and honour, to defend himself. Besides, I never will be a party in making my private affairs or those of others to be topics of general discussion. Who can know them but the actors. And if they have erred, or often when they have not erred, is there not pain enough to punish them? My public character as a writer of verses—as a speculator on politics, or morals, or religion—as the adherent of any party or cause—is public property; and my good faith or ill faith in conducting these, my talent, my penetration, or my stupidity, are all subjects of criticism. I am almost certain that Southey, not Gifford, wrote that criticism on your poems. I never saw Gifford in my life, and it is impossible that he should have taken a personal hatred to me. Gifford is a bitter partisan, and has a very muddled head; but I hear from those who know him that he is rather a mild man personally, and I don't know that he has ever changed sides." Though just to Southey this is more than kind to Gifford.

A letter to Peacock written from Naples, December 22, has a discerning analysis of Byron of which I shall quote only a sentence or two as an instance of Shelley's unusual power, in his analysis of men, of discriminating in an individual between his genius and his personal character. The same power of discrimination has been evident in Shelley's relationship with Godwin; it is apparent likewise in his comments on Wordsworth whom he esteemed as greatly for a poet as he condemned for a political reactionary and turncoat. Byron likewise he very greatly—perhaps too greatly—admired as a poet while holding a very just and dispassionate view of the man. "I entirely agree with what you say about 'Childe Harold.' The spirit in which it is written is, if insane, the most wicked and mischievous insanity that ever was given forth. It is a kind of obstinate and self-willed folly, in which he hardens himself. I remonstrated with him in vain on the tone of mind from which such a view of things alone arises. For its real root is very different from its apparent one. Nothing can be less sublime than the true source of these expressions of contempt and desperation. . . . He associates with wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices which are not only not named, but I believe seldom even conceived in England. He says he disapproves, but he endures. He is heartily and deeply discontented with himself; and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and

the destiny of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair? But that he is a great poet, I think the address to ocean proves." Where else can one find as much true analysis of Byron packed in so little space?

There is in the same letter a description of the English burial place in Rome which he so liked and which he seemed to view almost with a prescient eye, as perhaps, subconsciously, he did. "The English burying-place is a green slope near the walls, under the pyramidal tomb of Cestius, and is, I think, the most beautiful and solemn cemetery I ever beheld. To see the sun shining on its bright grass, fresh, when we first visited it, with the autumnal dews, and hear the whispering of the wind among the leaves of the trees which have overgrown the tomb of Cestius, and the soil which is stirring in the sun-warm earth, and to mark the tombs, mostly of women and young people who were buried there, one might, if one were to die, desire the sleep they seem to sleep. Such is the human mind, and so it peoples with its wishes vacancy and oblivion."

The letters written from Naples to Peacock abound with the contrasts characteristic of Shelley and reflected in his verse: "From my peculiar mode of travelling I saw little of the country, but could just observe that the wild beauty of the scenery and the barbarous ferocity of the inhabitants progressively increased. On entering Naples, the first circumstance that engaged my attention was an assassination. A youth ran out of a shop, pursued by a woman with a bludgeon, and a man armed with a knife. The man overtook him, and with one blow in the neck laid him dead in the road. On my expressing the emotions of horror and indignation which I felt, a Calabrian priest, who travelled with me, laughed heartily, and attempted to quiz me, as what the English call a flat. I never felt such an inclination to beat anyone.... But external nature in these delightful regions contrasts with and compensates for the deformity and degradation of humanity.... We set off an hour after sunrise one radiant morning in a little boat; there was not a cloud in the sky, nor a wave upon the sea, which was so translucent that you could see the hollow caverns clothed with the glaucous sea-moss, and the leaves and branches of those delicate weeds that pave the unequal bottom of the water.... After passing the bay of Baiæ, and observing the ruins of its antique grandeur standing like rocks in the transparent sea under our boat, we landed to visit lake Avernus."

The familiar antithesis of the vileness of men and the beauty and benignity of nature Shelley no longer found tenable after visiting

Vesuvius. An earlier realistic note in his nature philosophy was evident in his letters descriptive of the glaciers and the avalanches of Switzerland. But there nature was aloof and indifferent to man rather than actively malevolent. Shelley had not, I believe, fairly faced the fact that in many places on the earth's surface nature has small toleration for man and his works, destroying both with what appears, from the human point of view, a kind of vindictiveness. In the tropics or in volcanic regions, the god of nature, if personified, can be imagined as a kind of devil, loving destruction for its own sake. To one brought up in England, where Nature is for the most part tamed and amiable, the evidences of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tidal waves must come as a shock and a revelation. Shelley had, of course, long since discarded the simple religious view that the earth and its fruits had been designed for man's use by a benevolent deity. Yet he unconsciously had clung to the typical romantic contrast, which Wordsworth had chiefly celebrated, between man and nature. In nature, robe of the immanent deity, man may find peace, strength, communion with God. Shelley, being in his own way a pantheist, was naturally sympathetic to such a philosophy, or if not a philosophy, such an emotional attitude. The destruction wrought by Vesuvius, of which he had, of course, read in Pliny, became emotionally real to him when he viewed the ruins of Pompeii or when he climbed Vesuvius, or visited the grotto of the dogs with its mephitic gases. The descriptions of these experiences suggest the importance which they had for him.

Of Vesuvius he writes: "Vesuvius is, after the glaciers, the most impressive exhibition of the energies of nature I ever saw, It has not the immeasurable greatness, the overpowering magnificence, nor, above all, the radiant beauty of the glaciers; but it has all their character of tremendous and irresistible strength. . . . On the summit is a kind of irregular plain, the most horrible chaos that can be imagined; riven into ghastly chasms, and heaped up with tumuli of great stones and cinders, and enormous rocks blackened and calcined, which had been thrown from the volcano upon one another in terrible confusion. In the midst stands the conical hill from which volumes of smoke, and the fountains of liquid fire, are rolled forth forever. The mountain is at present in a slight state of eruption; and a thick heavy white smoke is perpetually rolled out, interrupted by enormous columns of an impenetrable black bituminous vapour, which is hurled up, fold after fold, into the sky with a deep hollow sound, and fiery stones are rained down from its darkness, and a black shower of ashes fell

even where we sat." The passage suggests the lines in *Prometheus Unbound*:

... Sceptred curse,  
Who all our green and azure universe  
Threatenedst to muffle round with black destruction, sending  
A solid cloud to rain hot thunder-stones,  
And splinter and knead down my children's bones,  
All I bring forth, to one void mass battering and blending.

The lines have more than a descriptive value. They voice an accusation to Jupiter and imply the philosophical question which Shelley debated in the poem: How account for evil in a world created by a benevolent God? For the evil lies not only in man but in Nature herself. It was Shelley's experience at Vesuvius which awakened him fully to this truth.

Another brief passage in a letter of February 25, 1819, to Peacock records a similar experience which likewise has its clear echo in *Prometheus*. "The Grotta del Cane, too, we saw, because other people see it; but would not allow the dogs to be exhibited in torture for our curiosity. The poor little animals stood moving their tails in a slow and dismal manner, as if perfectly resigned to their condition—a cur-like emblem of voluntary servitude. The effect of the vapour, which extinguishes a torch, is to cause suffocation at last, through a process which makes the lungs feel as if they were torn by sharp points within. So a surgeon told us, who tried the experiment on himself." In *Prometheus* the poisonous vapors which the earth emits during the reign of Jupiter becomes beneficent gases when the tyrant is overthrown.

These experiences left their definite mark on Shelley's imagination and modified his philosophy which was taking form in its greatest poetical expression at this time. He writes to Peacock, January 26, 1819: "O, if I had health, and strength, and equal spirits, what boundless intellectual improvement might I not gather in this wonderful country! At present I write little else but poetry, and little of that. My first act of 'Prometheus' is complete, and I think you would like it. I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonising the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt, and I shall be content, by exercising my fancy, to amuse myself, and perhaps some others, and

cast what weight I can into the scale of that balance, which the giant of Arthegall holds." The allusion, which Peacock explains, is to the *Fairy Queen*: "The Giant has scales, in which he professes to weigh right and wrong, and rectify the physical and moral evils which result from inequality of condition. Shelley once pointed out this passage to me, observing 'Artegall argues with the Giant; the Giant has the best of the argument; Artégall's iron man knocks him over into the sea and drowns him. This is the usual way in which power deals with opinion.' I said, 'That was not the lesson Spenser intended to convey.' 'Perhaps not,' he said; 'it is the lesson which he conveys to me. I am of the Giant's faction.'" It is a characteristic anecdote and his statement that he considered poetry "very subordinate to moral and political science" is characteristic, also, of a mood, not the mood in which the *Defence of Poetry* was written. Yet had the accidents of his life and his health and strength permitted, he would truly have devoted himself to the "great work" on political and moral science of which he speaks, in preference to writing poetry. The improvement of the human lot was his first concern, and political reform was essential to that improvement.

The letters to Peacock are mixed of comments on political affairs at home and descriptions of his Italian experiences. There is much about nature, sculpture, and architecture. The remains of the Greek temples interested him immensely and he writes of them with a discerning eye to their artistry and to what they imply of Greek civilization. The Greeks, he remarks (January 26), "lived in harmony with nature; and the interstices of their incomparable columns were portals, as it were, to admit the spirit of beauty which animates this glorious universe to visit those whom it inspired. If such is Pompeii, what was Athens?" And again: "I now understand why the Greeks were such great poets; and above all, I can account, it seems to me, for the harmony, the unity, the perfection, the uniform excellence, of all their works of art. They lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature, and nourished themselves upon the spirit of its forms. Their theatres were all open to the mountains and the sky. Their columns, the ideal types of a sacred forest, with its roof of interwoven tracery, admitted the light and wind; the odour and the freshness of the country penetrated the cities. Their temples were mostly upaithric; and the flying clouds, the stars, or the deep sky, were seen above. O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world; but for the Christian religion, which put the finishing stroke on the ancient system; but

for those changes that conducted Athens to its ruin—to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!” It is a useful passage with which to confound those critics who insist that Shelley was the arch Romanticist and that Romanticism and Classicism stand at opposite poles of literary theory and form.

Shelley's Italian letters offer many temptations to quotation but a few only of his many comments on art and architecture must suffice to illustrate his esthetic growth. The following passage (March 23) descriptive of the arch of Constantine has its poetic counterpart in *Prometheus*: “That of Constantine, or rather of Titus (for the relief and sculpture, and even the colossal images of Dacian captives, were torn by a decree of the senate from an arch dedicated to the latter, to adorn that of this stupid and wicked monster, Constantine, one of whose chief merits consists in establishing a religion, the destroyer of those arts which would have rendered so base a spoliation unnecessary), is the most perfect. It is an admirable work of art. It is built of the finest marble, and the outline of the reliefs is in many parts as perfect as if just finished. Four Corinthian fluted columns support, on each side, a bold entablature, whose bases are loaded with reliefs of captives in every attitude of humiliation and slavery. The compartments above express, in bolder relief, the enjoyment of success; the conqueror on his throne, or in his chariot, or nodding over the crushed multitudes, who writhe under his horses' hoofs, as those below express the torture and abjectness of defeat. There are three arches, whose roofs are panelled with fretwork, and their sides adorned with similar reliefs. The keystone of these arches is supported each by two winged figures of Victory, whose hair floats on the wind of their own speed, and whose arms are outstretched, bearing trophies, as if impatient to meet. . . . Never were monuments so completely fitted to the purpose for which they were designed, of expressing that mixture of energy and error which is called a triumph.” To this may be added a subsequent brief passage: “The figures of Victory, with unfolded wings, and each spurning back a globe with outstretched feet, are perhaps, more beautiful than those on either of the others. Their lips are parted: a delicate mode of indicating the fervour of their desire to arrive at the destined resting-place, and to express the eager respiration of their speed.”

This is an appropriate place in which to glance at Shelley's *Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence*, sixty of which, surviving from a greater number, are published by Forman. Shelley made these notes apparently for his own use and without thought of publication. They

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are vigorous impressionistic comments on the emotional effects aroused by the sculptures; but intermixed are comments esthetically more discerning which serve to support the opinion previously stated that of sculpture, as also of architecture, Shelley's criticisms are intuitively more technical than of painting, and are such as an artist might himself pass on the work of another artist. The sentences are torn from their context but identification of the notes is made by number. "The contrast between the flowing robe which wraps the lower part of his form, and the soft but more defined outline of the leg of the Bacchanal who supports him, is in the true harmony of Art." (3) "It seeks to express what cannot be expressed in sculpture—the coarser and more violent effects of comic feeling cannot be seized by this art. Tenderness, sensibility, enthusiasm, terror, poetic inspiration, the profound, the beautiful, Yes." (28) "The figures are walking as it were with a sauntering and idle pace, and talking to each other as they walk, and this is expressed in the motions of their delicate and flowing forms. One arm of Bacchus rests on the shoulder of Ampelus, and the other, the fingers being gently curved as with the burning spirit which animates their flexible joints, is gracefully thrown forward corresponding with the advance of the opposite leg." (29) "Through the limbs there seems to flow a spirit of life which gives them lightness. Nothing can be more perfectly lovely than the legs and the union of the feet with the ancles, and the fading away of the lines of the feet to the delicate extremities. It is like a spirit even in dreams. The neck is long yet full and sustains the head with its profuse and knotted hair as if it needed no sustaining." (48).

In the same collection of notes is a description of the view from the Pitti Gardens which will appropriately serve as a preface to the *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* descriptive of a similar scene: "You see below, Florence a smokeless city, its domes and spires occupying the vale; and beyond to the right the Apennines, whose base extends even to the walls, and whose summits were intersected with ashen-coloured clouds. The green vallies of these mountains which gently unfold themselves upon the plain, and the intervening hills covered with vineyards and olive plantations are occupied by the villas which are as it were another city; a Babylon of palaces and gardens. In the midst of the picture rolls the Arno, now full with the winter rains, through woods, and bounded by the aerial snow and summits of the Lucchese Apennines. On the left a magnificent buttress of lofty craggy hills, overgrown with wilderness, juts out in many shapes over a lovely vale, and approaches the walls

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of the city. Cascini and Ville occupy the pinnacles and the abutments of those hills, over which is seen at intervals the aethereal mountain line hoary with snow and intersected by clouds. The vale below is covered with cypress groves whose obeliskine forms of intense green pierce the grey shadow of the wintry hill that overhangs them.—The cypresses too of the garden form a magnificent foreground of accumulated verdure; pyramids of dark leaves and shining cones rising out of a mass, beneath which were cut like caverns recesses which conducted into walks.—The Cathedral with its grey marble Campanile and the other domes and spires of Florence were at our feet.” The passage has considerable technical interest as showing Shelley’s exact and careful observation and as suggesting the likelihood that many of the descriptive passages in his poems, whether of nature or architecture, are transcriptions of actual experiences the identification of which is, of course, difficult and often impossible. It is a reflection, however, which serves to correct a popular misconception that Shelley is fanciful and his idealization of scene without a solid basis in the actual.

The poem *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* was written in October, 1818, and published with *Rosalind and Helen* in 1819. The writer standing high in the hills looks down upon the plain of Lombardy and distant Venice, a scene which, like the description of Florence as seen from the Pitti Gardens, he records with the same fidelity to fact. But it is fact suffused with personal emotion and blent with the thoughts personal and impersonal which the scene evokes. It is a poem which marks Shelley’s artistic maturity. In it are blent all his essential qualities: exactness of observation, felicity of word and rhythm, emotional responsiveness, and depth of reflection. The poem displays excellently Shelley’s powers of head and heart.

It is a profoundly depressing poem, for it combines a pessimism and disillusionment more appropriate to middle age with the sensitiveness and the ability to suffer which is youth’s. Shelley too soon had pierced the shams and illusions of life, had been too early undeceived in love and friendship. He had early learned the cruelty and brutality of man, and the high hopes which had fired him as a youth had died as he perceived his powerlessness to improve the human lot. The world was deaf to his words; the poems which he wrote dropped into silence like pebbles in a well. He was convinced of his complete futility and yet was driven to exercise those powers which it were death to hide. That life was a “deep, wide sea of misery” and “the waters of wide Agony” was for him a literal statement of fact. He



had found it to be so. And the end, ever seen but receding, is death. What, he asks, if even in "the haven of the grave" there is no love nor friendship to greet the weary voyager? If so he will have been prepared by life, void both of love and friendship, for such a consummation. The nerves which were tortured by living will have become deadened both to pleasure and to pain. To those who have suffered too greatly death is a matter of indifference, provoking neither hope nor fear.

It would be impossible to endure life were it not that there are flowering islands in the "sea of misery" and such a one is a day which he describes when, from a peak in the Euganean Hills he looks down upon the plain of Lombardy and distant Venice, a scene of beauty and departed greatness, for Venice, once Ocean's child and queen has become the slave of slaves. If Venice should awake to freedom, she and her sister cities might unite new victories to the glories of the past. If not, let her sink beneath the sea and be it remembered of her only that an English poet, Byron, once found refuge there, sufficient cause to make her immortal. The very mention of the word liberty animates the poet—

Lo, the sun floats up the sky,  
Like thought-wingèd Liberty.

It shines upon "many domèd Padua," also enslaved, doomed to the domination of Death and Sin since the days of the medieval tyrant Ezzelin.

Men must reap the things they sow  
Force from force must ever flow,  
Or worse; but 't is a bitter woe  
That love or reason cannot change  
The despot's rage, the slave's revenge.

The heritage of sin is slavery and darkness, for—

In thine halls the lamp of learning,  
Padua, now no more is burning.

The mood of despair is succeeded by one of hope. Perhaps "new fires from antique light" may yet relight the lamp and Tyranny become afraid. It is in a mood less despairing that the poet describes the mountains, "the olive-sandalled Apennine" and the Alps lying beneath the noon of an autumnal sun which serves to fuse all nature and the observer into one. They

Interpenetrated lie  
 By the glory of the sky:  
 Be it love, light, harmony,  
 Odor, or the soul of all  
 Which from heaven like dew doth fall,  
 Or the mind which feeds this verse  
 Peopling the lone universe.

The Platonic character of the lines is obvious. Some unifying force which may be characterized variously in terms both physical and spiritual serves momentarily to unite observer and the thing observed. Both perhaps are but manifestations of the mind which comprehends the universe. The sense of identification is brief, for the "ancient pilot, Pain" soon seizes the helm of the "frail bark of this lone being." Yet the poet surmises that there must be other "flowering isles"

In the sea of life and agony;

and other spirits like his own. Perhaps for all such is a place of love and refuge where happiness dwells and the "polluting multitude" enticed thither by envious spirits of the air might feel the "love which heals all strife."

They, not it, would change; and soon  
 Every sprite beneath the moon  
 Would repent its envy vain,  
 And the earth grow young again.

It is characteristic of Shelley's thought that he should seek escape from his own misery in the contemplation of something outside himself, in society, in liberty, in philosophy. But as he contemplates the world of men without as visible in the cities of Venice and Padua he can see little to inspire hope. He toys for a moment with the thought of a revival of the spirit of liberty but is himself unconvinced. He falls back then upon an intuition, his momentary sense of union with the all comprehending spirit of the universe. This, too, does not endure and the sense of his own misery returns. There remains then only the languid hope that he and others like him may find some permanent refuge in the ocean of being, and the force of love which animates them prove sufficiently strong to convert those who would destroy their paradise. These dreams, these speculations, serve for a time to blunt his suffering. They afford a temporary escape from misery, but they do not, in this poem, carry any great degree of

conviction to the reader. The sense of union with the mind that peoples the universe is an intellectual, not an emotional, one. It is but the recollection of some earlier experience more profoundly felt. It does not rise to the point of conviction. The Platonism to which Shelley increasingly subscribes is not sufficiently powerful in all moods to assuage his personal suffering.

Even less potent is it in the companion poems descriptive of Shelley's depression in the summer and autumn of 1818, the *Invocation to Misery*, the *Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples*, and the sonnet which begins "Lift not the painted veil." The poem to Misery is written in a macabre vein which is somehow false and insincere in its effect because its devices are fanciful and elaborate. Yet the emotion which inspired it may have been, and doubtless was, as genuine as that which animates the *Stanzas*. It is an hysterical emotion, however, and therefore out of control. Such instances of hysteria are rare in the mature Shelley and have been magnified out of all due proportion by those who perversely misinterpret his work. The *Stanzas* are more genuine and more characteristic. There is little to say of them. Shelley perceives the beauty of the scene about him and feels his utter loneliness. He has neither hope, nor health, nor peace. "Despair itself is mild" and he can dream pleasurably that death might steal on him like sleep. Some might lament his death and yet regret it less than the passing of this glorious day whose memory will linger, for he is "one whom men love not." The sonnet which employs the figure of which Shelley is fond, that which likens life to a painted veil, is one of his best. Its latter half succinctly summarizes the thought which underlies the poems of despair:

. . .—he sought,  
For his lost heart was tender, things to love,  
But found them not, alas! Nor was there aught  
The world contains the which he could approve.  
Through the unheeding many he did move,  
A splendor among shadows, a bright blot  
Upon this gloomy scene, a Spirit that strove  
For truth, and like the Preacher found it not.

The pessimistic note is frequent enough in Shelley's maturer verse, but no group of poems of any period is so consistently dark as those of the autumn of 1819. The causes are not difficult to assign—ill-health, nostalgia, and the haunting sense that all his work was sterile and his powers wasted. A bit of success might have done much to

hearten him but that he never knew. It was through his own inherent strength and the faith which he derived from philosophy that he mastered despair. *Julian and Maddalo*, written in the fall of 1818, revised in the spring of 1819, and posthumously published in 1824, contains passages which set forth parts of that philosophy with explicitness and affords a key to his more complete philosophic system which he was concurrently expressing in *Prometheus Unbound*. Julian is Shelley and Maddalo is Byron. The poem, which grew out of Shelley's visit to Byron in the summer of 1818, purports to record their conversations and certain incidents of their association. The story itself is slight and in part enigmatic. The philosophy is explicit and its nature is intimated in the Preface which characterizes the protagonists of the dramatic narrative. "Julian is an Englishman of good family, passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may be yet susceptible. Without concealing the evil in the world he is forever speculating how good may be made superior." The phrase "the power of man over his own mind" goes to the heart of it, showing that Shelley had accepted the doctrine of the freedom of the will. This the poem more explicitly states.

The poem recounts a horseback ride taken by Julian and Maddalo at sunset along the Venetian sands and their return by gondola during which they see a dreary madhouse on an island and hear the hoarse clanging of its bell. The depressing sight leads them to philosophic discourse in which Maddalo speaks pessimistically of human destiny:

"And such," he cried, "is our mortality;  
And this must be the emblem and the sign  
Of what should be eternal and divine!  
And, like that black and dreary bell, the soul,  
Hung in a heaven-illumined tower, must toll  
Our thoughts and our desires to meet below  
Round the rent heart and pray—as madmen do  
For what? they know not, till the night of death,  
As sunset that strange vision, severeth  
Our memory from itself, and us from all  
We sought, and yet were baffled."

To which philosophy, implying that man is but a "passive thing," Julian later replies in a passage of the highest import in determining Shelley's philosophy at this time:

## Our Will Enchains Us

"... It is our will  
 That thus enchains us to permitted ill.  
 We might be otherwise; we might be all  
 We dream of happy, high, majestic.  
 Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek.  
 But in our mind? and if we were not weak,  
 Should we be less in deed than in desire?"  
 "Ay, if we were not weak—and we aspire  
 How vainly to be strong!" said Maddalo;  
 "You talk Utopia." "It remains to know,"  
 I then rejoined, "and those who try may find  
 How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;  
 Brittle perchance as straw. We are assured  
 Much may be conquered, much may be endured  
 Of what degrades and crushes us. We know  
 That we have power over ourselves to do  
 And suffer—what, we know not till we try;  
 But something nobler than to live and die.  
 So taught those kings of old philosophy,  
 Who reigned before religion made men blind;  
 And those who suffer with their suffering kind  
 Yet feel this faith religion."

The meaning of the passage is explicit. Julian, who is unmistakably Shelley, is expounding the idealistic philosophy of Plato and the neo-Platonists in which the soul determines its own fate and ascends or descends according to its desire. If not wholly free it is partly so, is not wholly the victim of circumstance. "It is our will that thus enchains us." So Shelley must believe and find justification for his faith if effort to improve the human lot is to have meaning. For otherwise all effort is futile. This in his early youth he had not believed, but deeper thought and the reading of philosophy had convinced him of his error. It remains with the individual will to determine whether we shall free ourselves from all that is hateful in the world. Political and social tyranny, all the man-made evils of society, exist only because we permit them to exist, because we are the slaves of custom which we ourselves perpetuate. The thesis is more subtly expounded in *Prometheus Unbound* but the gist of it is put unmistakably in the passage just quoted. Nevertheless there is a qualification of this belief implied in the human instance which Maddalo summons in its disproof. He takes Julian to the madhouse on the island in the lagoon

and there the two overhear the ravings of a madman whom Maddalo has befriended. This man, whose origin is unknown, has been deserted by a lady who came with him from France and in her absence he has become melancholy-mad. From his overheard soliloquies it is possible darkly to piece together some of his story.

The questions which immediately arise are these: How much of this story is fictitious and how much based on fact? Why does Shelley introduce it? Is it a parable, perhaps, of Shelley's own life put thus to disguise the facts? As has been seen, Shelley in his narrative poems not infrequently dramatizes himself. Laon one suspects to be a character of this sort, and Helen's husband, Lionel, also. The madman voices much the same despair as Shelley expresses in other poems of this period which have been discussed. Yet if Shelley thus dramatizes his own emotions, expresses his own desolation, is the cause in both the madman and himself the same? For the madman, it seems, has become insane because one who has professed to love him no longer does so. Does Shelley mean himself when he writes—

“And that thy lot may be less desolate  
Than his on whom thou tramplest, I refrain  
From that sweet sleep which medicines all pain.”

This seemingly says that he refrains from suicide because his death would make the lot of the beloved one, desolate, facts which, in Shelley's case, could imply only Mary Shelley and his belief that she no longer loved him. What basis can there be for such a conjecture? Or can he refer to some unidentified woman who no longer loves him and from whom the Italian exile has separated him? This last guess is invalidated seemingly by the quoted lines which declare that her welfare is dependent upon his remaining alive.

It is only too easy to raise mare's nests in investigating the emotional lives of those of whom we have insufficient knowledge and I have no desire to do so in the present instance. Yet any student of Shelley must have paused in reading *Julian and Maddalo* and asked himself the question I have put. There is evidence also which justifies it at least partly. Shelley had educated Mary to the extent of her powers and in the first years of her marriage to him she had striven to share his intellectual life. There is evidence that she had failed to do so. Her comments on the *Witch of Atlas* reveal her complete misunderstanding of that poem and those on *Prometheus* reveal only a partial comprehension. The mocking introduction to the *Witch* also suggests that she had advised Shelley to write works more com-

prehensible and pleasing to the critics. He was not a successful writer. Her own work, *Frankenstein*, had met more approval than anything of his. How much he chafed under such criticism it is impossible to say but he must have perceived that he had not found in her the wholly understanding mind needful to his happiness. A little later, the Emilia Viviani episode with its unfortunate likening of Emilia to the sun and Mary to the moon suggests, if nothing more, Mary's failure to fill the rôle of affinity or to personify the earthly manifestation of intellectual beauty. And again, later, is Trelawny's evidence that Mary Shelley chafed at the isolated unsocial life which they lived in Italy.

Mary can scarcely be blamed for her failure to comprehend all the workings of a mind far subtler and deeper than her own but the self-evident fact is that she did fail to do so. It is possible, therefore, that the story of the maniac deserted by the woman he loved is a poetic rendering of Shelley's own story, his perception that he was mentally alone, that she could not comprehend him, nor give wholly the sympathy which his lonely soul craved; and that she, comprehending her emotional failure and his perception of it, had charged him with coldness. Certainly the following lines suggest some real and remembered experience, not a poetic invention:

"Nay, was it I who wooed thee to this breast,  
Which like a serpent thou envenomest  
As in repayment of the warmth it lent?  
Didst thou not seek me for thine own content?  
Did not thy love awaken mine? I thought  
That thou wert she who said 'You kiss me not  
Ever; I fear you do not love me now'—  
In truth I loved even to my overthrow  
Her who would fain forget these words..."

How applicable are these lines to Mary Shelley? Lacking a fuller knowledge than we have of his relations to her and her failure to comprehend him, or of any coldness or fancied coldness he felt in her and which she attributed to him rather than to herself, it is impossible to declare dogmatically that the story of the madman is a parable of Mary and himself. Had the lines been written earlier they would have been applicable to Harriet, who was the wooer rather than the wooed. But it seems improbable that the poem refers to events so remote. It records too feelingly a present emotion. There is, of course, an alternative interpretation. Shelley may be writing of some one un-

known and unguessed. But of such a one, at this time of his life, there is no intimation.

The question then of personal facts underlying the story of the madman must be left unanswered. It may be the veiled story of Shelley's marriage to Mary and of some coldness or emotional division between them. If so, the complete dejection of the latter months of 1818 would be better accounted for than they are on the grounds of his exile and his failure to attain any recognition as a poet. If the facts are otherwise, the story may be taken wholly as an invention. Yet even so there are passages in the maniac's soliloquies which must be taken as Shelley's own arraignment of life, so congruous are they with other poems of this period expressive of Shelley's loathing of life and his desire for death. A selection from among these will suffice to prove the point:

"Month after month," he cried, "to bear this load,  
And, as a jade urged by the whip and goad,  
To drag life on—which like a heavy chain  
Lengthens behind with many a link of pain!—  
And not to speak my grief—oh, not to dare  
To give a human voice to my despair,  
But live, and move, and, wretched thing! smile on  
As if I never went aside to groan;  
And wear this mask of falsehood even to those  
Who are most dear—not for my own repose—  
Alas, no scorn or pain or hate could be  
So heavy as that falsehood is to me!  
But that I cannot bear more altered faces  
Than needs must be, more changed and cold embraces,  
More misery, disappointment and mistrust  
To own me for their father..."

That these lines refer to Shelley is evident from the simple fact that they are quite inapplicable to the maniac who, in his madhouse, lives quite apart from all friends and family and has been deserted by the lady who accompanied him to Italy.

The next passages likewise are clearly Shelley's analysis of himself:

"What Power delights to torture us? I know  
That to myself I do not wholly owe  
What now I suffer, though in part I may.  
Alas! none strewed sweet flowers upon the way



## Love's Betrayal

Where, wandering heedlessly, I met pale Pain,  
 My shadow, which will leave me not again.  
 If I have erred there was no joy in error,  
 But pain and insult and unrest and terror;  
 I have not, as some do, bought penitence  
 With pleasure, and a dark yet sweet offence;  
 For then,—if love and tenderness and truth  
 Had overlived hope's momentary youth,  
 My creed should have redeemed me from repenting;  
 But loathed scorn and outrage unrelenting  
 Met love excited by far other seeming  
 Until the end was gained; as one from dreaming  
 Of sweetest peace, I woke, and found my state  
 Such as it is—

“O Thou, my spirit's mate!  
 Who, for thou art compassionate and wise,  
 Wouldst pity me from thy most gentle eyes  
 If this sad writing thou shouldst ever see—  
 My secret groans must be unheard by thee;  
 Thou wouldst weep tears bitter as blood to know  
 Thy lost friend's incommunicable woe.  
 Ye few by whom my nature has been weighed  
 In friendship, let me not that name degrade  
 By placing on your hearts the secret load  
 Which crushes mine to dust. There is one road  
 To peace, and that is truth, which follow ye!  
 Love sometimes leads astray to misery.”

One more passage and I have done:

“It were  
 A cruel punishment for one most cruel,  
 If such can love, to make that love the fuel  
 Of the mind's hell—hate, scorn, remorse, despair;  
 But *me*, whose heart a stranger's tear might wear  
 As water-drops the sandy fountain-stone,  
 Who loved and pitied all things, and could moan  
 For woes which others hear not, and could see  
 The absent with the glance of fantasy,  
 And with the poor and trampled sit and weep,  
 Following the captive to his dungeon deep;

## A Nerve to Feel Oppression

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*Me*—who am as a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth,  
And was to thee the flame upon thy hearth,  
When all beside was cold;—that thou on me  
Shouldst rain these plagues of blistering agony!  
Such curses are from lips once eloquent  
With love's too partial praise! Let none relent  
Who intend deeds too dreadful for a name  
Henceforth, if an example for the same  
They seek:—for thou on me look'dst so, and so—  
And didst speak thus—and thus. I live to show  
How much men bear and die not!

“Thou wilt tell

It was to meet my love when thine grew less;  
Thou wilt admire how I could e'er address  
With the grimace of hate how horrible  
Such features to love's work. This taunt, though true,  
(For indeed Nature nor in form nor hue  
Bestowed on me her choicest workmanship)  
Shall not be thy defence; for since thy lip  
Met mine first, years long past,—since thine eye kindled  
With soft fire under mine,—I have not dwindled,  
Nor changed in mind or body, or in aught  
But as love changes what it loveth not  
After long years and many trials.”

The sex pathology suggested in these lines I shall leave the reader to discern for himself. In conclusion I shall cite a passage from Mrs. Shelley's note on the poems of 1818: “Constant and poignant physical suffering exhausted him; and though he preserved the appearance of cheerfulness, and often greatly enjoyed our wanderings in the environs of Naples, and our excursions on its sunny sea, yet many hours were passed when his thoughts, shadowed by illness, became gloomy, and then he escaped to solitude, and in verses, which he hid from fear of wounding me, poured forth morbid but too natural bursts of discontent and sadness. One looks back with unspeakable regret and gnawing remorse to such periods; fancying that had one been more alive to the nature of his feelings, and more attentive to soothe them, such would not have existed. . . .”

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Prometheus Unbound*



SHELLEY's letters from Rome are full of its architectural glories and the moral degradation of its people. He writes to Peacock, April 6, 1819: "We see no English society here; it is not probable that we would if we desired it, and I am certain that we should find it unsupportable. The manners of the rich English are wholly unsupportable and they assume pretensions which they would not venture upon in their own country." He then expresses interest in Hobhouse's campaign for a seat in the House of Commons and alludes to "that mischievous Cobbett." The *Prometheus Unbound*, of which one act he had informed Peacock in October as written, he now announces as completed. He refers to the original three acts, for the lyric fourth act was a subsequent addition. He says of it: "It is a drama, with characters and mechanism of a kind yet unattempted; and I think the execution is better than any of my former attempts." To Peacock's wish that he should return to England, he replies, "How is it possible? Health, competence, tranquillity—all these Italy permits, and England takes away. I am regarded by all who know or hear of me, except, I think, on the whole, five individuals, as a rare prodigy of crime and pollution, whose look even might infect. This is a large computation and I don't think I could mention more than three. Such is the spirit of the English abroad as well as at home."

In a letter of May 29 to Leigh Hunt, Shelley announces the dedication to his friend of *The Cenci* which he had begun after the first three acts of *Prometheus Unbound*. He observes: "Those writings which I have hitherto published, have been little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. I can also perceive in them the literary defects incidental to youth and impatience; they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been.... In that patient and irreconcilable enmity with domestic and political tyranny and imposture, which the tenor of your life has illustrated, and which, had I the health and talents, should illustrate mine, let us, comforting each other in our task, live and die." A

few days later, on June 7, his little son, William, died and on June 10 Shelley, Mary, and Clare Clairmont removed to Leghorn where they remained for three months before returning to Florence in October. It was at this period Shelley wrote the greater part of the *Cenci*. It is convenient to make a running comment at this point upon the letters written during the summer before critically examining *Prometheus Unbound* and its companion poems. *Prometheus* had not yet received its lyrical fourth act and may properly, therefore, be thus for a time deferred.

[The letters written in the summer of 1819 abound in references to his literary projects, in critical comments on other writers, and in discussions of the political situation in England, at this time very dark and commanding his complete interest.] Though the excerpts I select lack continuity they reveal the character of his thought at this time and reveal, incidentally, his recovery from the utter dejection which had gripped him a few months previous. His health and reputation were little improved and the death of his second child had profoundly grieved him. Yet the tenacity and strength of his character were such that he persisted in his studies and his creative work amid all his misfortunes. It is impossible to read these letters without respecting the power of his will and his intellectual mastery of the body and the weakening emotions. Shelley's fragility was neither of mind nor will but of the body only. It would seem unnecessary so to stress the obvious were it not for the popular misconceptions which linger on despite all the evidence that disproves them.

On June 20 he writes to Peacock, "O that I could return to England! How heavy a weight when misfortune is added to exile.... Enough of melancholy! 'Nightmare Abbey,' though no cure, is a palliative.... I am delighted with 'Nightmare Abbey.' I think Scythrop a character admirably conceived and executed.... I suppose the moral is contained in what Falstaff says—'For God's sake, talk like a man of this world;' and yet, looking deeper into it, is not the misdirected enthusiasm of Scythrop what J. C. calls the 'salt of the earth?'" His good-natured acceptance of Scythrop as a caricature of himself and his defense of "misdirected enthusiasm" are alike worthy of remark. He goes on to commend Cobbett, of whom his opinion seems to have, justifiably, varied from time to time: "Cobbett still more and more delights me, with all my horror of the sanguinary commonplaces of his creed." A little later, in July, he writes again to Peacock asking his good offices to secure a presentation of *The Cenci* at Covent Garden. "I have taken some pains to make my play

fit for representation.... It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were.... My principal doubt, as to whether it would succeed as an acting play, hangs entirely on the question as to whether such a thing as incest in this shape, however treated, would be admitted on the stage. I think, however, it will form no objection: considering, first, that the facts are matter of history; and secondly, the peculiar delicacy with which I have treated it." The manager of Covent Garden was of a different opinion. He thought the subject "to be so objectionable, that he could not even submit the part to Miss O'Neil for perusal." It was this actress whom Shelley wished to play the chief rôle.

The letters to Hogg are few in Shelley's last years and despite the fact that he addresses him always as "My dear Friend" there is a subtle lack of true intimacy. In a letter of July 25 he tells of his reading: "...Homer again and some plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and some lives of Plutarch this spring." He then recommends Hogg to read Calderon whom recently Shelley had learned to read under the tutelage of Mrs. Gisborne, one of his few friends in Italy. His commendation of Calderon is repeated in later letters to Hunt and Peacock. To Hunt, writing August 15, he comments on *Julian and Maddalo* which he had designed for the *Examiner* but which was, in fact, only posthumously published. One statement in it is to be remarked, that on the third character, the madman, certainly, for there are but three characters: "Two of the characters you will recognize; the third is also in some degree a painting from nature, but with respect to time and place, ideal." By this he can mean, I think, nothing else than that Hunt will recognize in the character of the madman "in some degree" a portrait of Shelley himself. This, if true, must strengthen the surmise that the poem is essentially autobiographical. He goes on to discuss the familiar style in which it is written and its suitability for a story of this type. He adds: "Not that the familiar style is to be admitted in the treatment of a subject wholly ideal, or in that part of any subject which relates to common life, where the passion, exceeding a certain limit, touches the boundaries of that which is ideal. Strong passion expresses itself in metaphor, borrowed from objects alike remote or near, and casts over all the shadow of its own greatness."

It was to Hunt that he first expressed himself adequately on the subject of Godwin whose impositions and libels Shelley had borne pa-

tiently for five years: "Mary's spirits continue dreadfully depressed, and I cannot expose her to Godwin in this state. I wrote to this hard-hearted person (the first letter I had written for a year), on account of the terrible state of her mind, and entreated him to try to soothe her in his next letter. The *very* next letter, received yesterday, and addressed to her, called her husband (me) 'a disgraceful and flagrant person'—tried to persuade her that I was under great engagements to give him *more* money (after having given him £4,700), and urged her if she ever wished a connection to continue between him and her to force me to get money for him. He cannot persuade her that I am what I am not, nor place a shade of enmity between her and me—but he heaps on her misery, stiff misery. I have not yet shewn her the letter—but I must. I doubt whether I ought not to expose this solemn lie; for such and not a man is Godwin. But I shall as is our custom (I mean yours and mine), err on the side of patience and endurance. I suspect my character, if measured with his, would sustain no diminution among those who know us both.—I have bought bitter knowledge with £4,700. I wish it were all yours now!" Thus Shelley's long forbearance at last wore thin. A year later he wrote to Godwin himself in substance what he had written Hunt.

Instances of humor in Shelley's letters are all too few and such as there are should never be omitted from any account of him. This, in a letter to Peacock of August 22, is none of the subtlest. It is descriptive of Mr. Gisborne, the tedious husband of the Shelleys' friend, Maria Gisborne: He, "a man with little thin lips, receding forehead, and a prodigious nose, is an excessive bore. His nose is sometimes quite Slawkenbergian—it weighs on the imagination to look at it. It is that sort of nose which transforms all the g's its wearer utters into k's. It is a nose once seen never to be forgotten, and which requires the utmost stretch of Christian charity to forgive. I, you know, have a little turn-up nose; Hogg has a large hook one; but add them both together, square them, cube them, you would have but a faint idea of the nose to which I refer." Lamb would have carried the description in a similar vein of extravagance but with a defter phrasing. Two allusions to Lamb in letters to Hunt of September 3 and September 27 may be appropriately cited in this place: "What a lovely thing is his 'Rosamund Gray,' how much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest parts of our nature is in it! When I think of such a mind as Lamb's—when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection, what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame?" And again: "Of Lamb you know

my opinion, and you can bear witness to the regret which I felt, when I learned that the calumny of an enemy had deprived me of his society whilst in England."

The letters of this period contain several expressions of Shelley's admiration of Calderon: "He exceeds all modern dramatists, with the exception of Shakespeare, whom he resembles, however, in the depth of thought and subtlety of imagination of his writings, and in the rare power of interweaving delicate and powerful comic traits with the most tragical situations, without diminishing their interest. I rate him far above Beaumont and Fletcher." (September 21.) To Hunt, Shelley continues his observations on art which mostly he had directed to Peacock. One passage I think is of more than usual interest: "Perhaps I attended more to Sculpture than Painting, its form being more easily intelligible than those of the latter. Yet, I saw the famous works of *Raphael*, whom I agree with the whole world in thinking the finest painter, why, I can tell you another time. With respect to *Michael Angelo* I dissent. . . . His famous painting in the Sixtine Chapel seems to me deficient in beauty and majesty, both in the conception and the execution. It might have contained all the forms of terror and delight—and it is a dull and wicked emblem of a dull and wicked thing. Jesus Christ is like an angry pot-boy, and God like an old alehouse-keeper looking out of a window."

Such was the art and literary chatter with which Shelley, having little other news, filled his letters to his friends in England. From them he asked, above other things, political news. The mails were slow and uncertain. Newspapers did not always arrive, and meanwhile the political and financial situation of England appeared to Shelley, regarding it afar, as increasingly menacing. On August 16, a reform meeting at Manchester was broken up by the cavalry and a number of people killed and injured. This was the Peterloo Massacre famous in the history of the reform movement which culminated in the bill of 1832. Shelley's first response to it is expressed briefly in a letter of September 6 to his publishers, the Olliers: "The same day that your letter came, came the news of the Manchester work, and the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously to hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody, murderous opposition of its destroyers. 'Something must be done. What, yet I know not.'"

¶ Shelley's interest in the reform movement is reflected in several works in both verse and prose which have shortly to be considered. It is best before considering them, however, to take up the poems

published in 1820 which were the work of 1818-1819, the volume which, besides *Prometheus Unbound*, contained *The Sensitive Plant*, *A Vision of the Sea*, *Ode to Heaven*, *An Exhortation*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *An Ode*, written October, 1819, before the Spaniards had recovered their liberty, *The Cloud*, *To a Skylark*, and *Ode to Liberty*—in all the greatest single volume of Shelley's verse. The poems of this group, similar in imagery and philosophy, represent a synthesis and reconciliation of those ideas which have been traced in Shelley's letters and earlier writings in verse and prose. An interpretation of them will make clear Shelley's philosophy when he had attained the height of his intellectual and poetic powers.

It is well to begin with what is, perhaps, Shelley's greatest achievement, for so he himself regarded it, his *Prometheus Unbound*. In the light of its interpretation the shorter poems with which it was published will be more easily intelligible. For in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley wrestled with ultimate problems, and the conclusions at which he arrived are those to which he essentially adhered in the short remainder of his life. Therefore, to understand this volume is to have the key to Shelley's thought. As philosopher and moralist, as rebel and reformer, rôles which he valued more than that of poet, he becomes intelligible. I have in other books discussed at length the nature of Shelley's ideas in *Prometheus* together with their sources and the poetical symbols in which they are expressed. Here, therefore, I shall discard all scholarly apparatus and briefly discuss the philosophical problems which Shelley undertook to solve in his poetic drama and the conclusions at which, as I understand them, he arrived.

Mrs. Shelley in her introductory notes to the poem gives some valuable hints as to its theme: "The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was, that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled. . . . Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. . . . That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system." Prometheus, the regenerator and benefactor of mankind, she goes on to say, is, when man is free, reunited with Asia, the spirit of love and beauty, their union being symbolical of man's happy reconciliation with nature from which evil had divorced him. So, briefly put, is the essence of the drama's theme, but it is, so put, scarcely intelligible and certainly devoid of emotional power. It is



therefore necessary, to understand it, rapidly to follow the development of the drama and point out its more important ideas. The fable, it may be remarked, is derived from the Greek of Aeschylus but Shelley departs very widely from his original.<sup>1</sup>

The poem opens with the soliloquy of Prometheus, the personification of humanity, the over-soul of mankind, when, chained to a cliff of the Caucasus, he addresses his enemy, Jupiter, and denounces him, predicting his ultimate overthrow. Jupiter, it is evident, is the god of evil now dominant in the world and master of all things but One—a reference seemingly to the One of the neo-Platonic philosophy, which is the mysterious source of all things—in common terminology, God. Jupiter, the tyrant and usurper, is therefore not the ultimate principle of good nor is he omnipotent over Prometheus although sufficiently powerful to enslave him. Prometheus also implies that Jupiter is in some sense his creation, that Prometheus permitted the usurpation of power by Jupiter, a riddle which becomes intelligible as the poem proceeds. The long apostrophe ends with the demand that the elements shall repeat for Prometheus the curse which he invoked upon Jupiter long ago and has forgotten. The elements, from fear of Jupiter's vengeance, dare not, nor dares the Earth, mother of Prometheus, destined under the tyranny of Jupiter to work disaster, famine, plague, and poison upon her children. The Phantasm of Jupiter, the shell in the underworld which awaits the spirit of Jupiter, is made to speak the curse uttered by Prometheus.

There is in the philosophy underlying the Phantasm of Jupiter much that is of an esoteric and mystical character which need not here be elaborated, though its origins in neo-Platonism should be remembered. Prometheus, hearing the curse, is repentant.

"It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;  
Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine.  
I wish no living thing to suffer pain."

The earth takes the words to mark the surrender of Prometheus to the will of Jupiter, and the utter destruction of earth and man. Jupiter knows otherwise and sends his Furies, both physical and mental, to torment his captive. Mercury endeavors, unavailingly, to bring Prometheus to yield. Whereupon the Furies bring horrible pictures before the mind of Prometheus of the evil and cruelty which ravage mankind. These are not only physical—famine, plague, and war—but the worse evils which enslave the soul, evils of tyranny, tradition, and religious bigotry. Worst vision of all is that of a

crucified youth who sought to bring love and forgiveness into the world and in whose name all manner of evil is wrought by those who profess to be his followers. But there are comforting visions also, auguries of what the future will be, visions of love, and self-sacrifice, and the beauties of artistic creation. The Furies are driven away.

The second act introduces Asia, who is Venus, the spirit of love and beauty in nature, and for long separated from Prometheus. Panthea, her sister, brings a message that Asia shall "follow"—where, is conveyed by mysterious sounds and echoes. Asia, feeling that the time of Prometheus' liberation is near, obeys. Her journey symbolically leads her back of the illusions of sense and the actuality of the material world to the preëxistence which, in the neo-Platonic philosophy, is the home of reality. There she descends to the cave of Demogorgon, who is fate or necessity, custodian of ultimate mysteries, to whom she puts the questions for which all philosophies seek an answer: Who is God? Is he omnipotent? If so, why does evil rule in this world? Demogorgon's answers are evasive but the central truth is clear, that Jupiter, ruler of evil, is not the ultimate God. Jupiter is the creation of man himself and has power only as man obeys him. Man makes his gods in his own likeness. Once they are made they tyrannize over him through the force of tradition and convention. Only love can overthrow them. The recantation of his curse upon Jupiter which Prometheus confesses early in the drama is an augury then of Jupiter's fall. By forgiving Jupiter (or in himself the creation of Jupiter), by supplanting hate with love, Prometheus has unconsciously gained the victory over his enemy. The dramatic expression of this conquest does not appear until the next act.

In this act Jupiter thinks to reduce man to eternal slavery and to make his throne secure. He has created a monster to supplant the might of Demogorgon, personification of Fate. The monster of Jupiter's invention is that necessity by which man enslaves himself, the belief that he is the victim, not the master, of circumstance. For, Shelley's argument is clear, if we believe we are enslaved we are in reality so. If we believe we are free we can to some extent now, and ultimately altogether, make of the world what we wish. Slavery and freedom, good and evil, exist in the mind itself, which controls, if it wishes, the material world. This lower, or material necessity with which Jupiter hopes to enslave the world is overcome in the event by Demogorgon, that higher necessity which moves at the command

of Love. By casting out hate Prometheus has identified himself with the ruling power of the universe which is Love, and Love commands Destiny or Fate, which is Demogorgon. Shelley's philosophy here is akin to neo-Platonism, in which the One is thought of as triune, the mysterious all-perfect source of life and energy, the creative brain, and the executive will. In this conception Prometheus, or mankind, by developing in himself the spirit of love grows into God, becoming himself the creative brain of God and commanding Demogorgon to execute his thoughts.

The fourth act depicts the liberated universe wherein man now vactuated by love becomes wholly master of circumstance and does whatever he wishes with it. The physical forces which had been devoted by Jupiter to evil ends become the servants of Love. Nature ceases then to be hostile to man and moves at his command. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions cease. The moon, warmed by the liberated energy emanating from the earth, becomes fruitful and populous. All nature sings a hymn of joy now that it has been released from the control of hate and moves only at the command of Love. Put in its baldest terms Shelley means that man, once he has learned to control himself, can learn to control the universe through his knowledge of science. But an ethical transformation, a moral revolution, is necessary before man, through his directing brain, can command the forces of nature to his advantage. This I believe to be the most significant point of Shelley's matured philosophy, his belief that the will is freed only through Love. Demogorgon's words—

“All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil”

strike the ethical keynote of the poem.”

Shelley's liberation from the materialism which had hampered his first philosophic gropings is, in *Prometheus*, complete. It was not easily achieved.†The wonder is that a man so young could have synthesized as he does in *Prometheus* the liberal social philosophy of the French revolutionary era, the more speculative theories of an advanced science, and the mystical philosophy of the neo-Platonists. His fusion of science and mysticism is apparent in his conception of force. This symbolically is electricity—in which speculation Shelley goes to Newton and later thinkers; and this force, electricity, is akin to the divine fire of the ancient philosophy. Shelley pursues the unifying concept yet farther—again not without precedent; the single unifying force of the universe is, in its physical manifestation, fire or electricity; in its spiritual, Love. “Love which is as fire” are the words.

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which the Earth employs to Asia. Shelley in his attempts to unify the universe, to reduce matter and energy and being to one principle, so enunciates it.

Shelley in this synthesis has, it appears, become to a considerable degree a mystic, but a mystic does not necessarily renounce the actualities about him. They, however physically unreal as shadows of some occult force, are nevertheless the products of thought and are manageable only by the operations of thought. Science, that is to say, is on its own plane justified in its beliefs and methods.<sup>1</sup> Shelley is attempting to reconcile science and philosophy on a metaphysical plane. Only so can he unify his thought, explain and ultimately eliminate evil from the scheme of things, and put the forces of nature into the control of man for the achievement of that Utopia which he desired. Remote as these speculations may seem to some from the realities of social reform they are to such a mind as Shelley's necessary. Only as he can get some grasp of the scheme of things as a whole can he believe in the triumph of good over evil and of man's enfranchisement through his own efforts. He was obliged to postulate some degree of freedom in the moral will and he drew into his synthesis the ethics of Christ which also were the ethics of the best pagan philosophies, for in Socrates, as in Christ, is found the ethical teaching that we should return good for evil.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of Prometheus opens the way to infinite speculation but its groundwork is clear—clear, that is, if Shelley's symbolical language be understood. Some of this is evident in *The Revolt of Islam*, the symbols of water in its various forms: the sea of ultimate being, the streams leading thither and bearing the souls as in a boat. These symbols derive from neo-Platonism. In *Prometheus* Shelley employs them and others similar with far greater virtuosity than before. They had clearly become familiar to him in his speculations. Thus the cloud, a key symbol, is constantly employed both of matter and of spirit. The spirits born into the earthly world are spilled like rain from a cloud. These return by brook and river to the sea of universal being whence they came. The cloud is therefore a symbol of fertility, of creation, whether material or spiritual. In *Prometheus* the frozen moon is restored to life upon the overthrow of Jupiter. The symbol of her reanimation is the birth of clouds, from which, and from the rains which they bear, come fertility and the growth of plant and animal. Shelley's interest in the cloud therefore was various—physical, metaphysical, and esthetic. Earlier passages cited from his letters record the careful observations which he made,

while in Italy, of cloud effects. When and how he acquired his scientific knowledge of the cloud and the chemical and electrical phenomena attendant thereon is not on record. Some knowledge he would have derived from Erasmus Darwin, who was interested in meteorology, but Shelley had read more than Darwin offers, presumably Beccaria's pioneer work on atmospheric electricity or that of later experimenters in the same field.

The emotional interest which clouds had for him was due partly to their light effects—and of all phenomena relating to light Shelley was an acute observer; partly also to the seeming freedom of the cloud. Shelley's predilection for all the phenomena of air and sky is universally remarked and has its evident emotional basis. Cloud, wind, and skylark are as poetic embodiments of discarnate spirit as earth affords. They have the utmost mobility of motion and have, therefore, a sympathetic attraction for a spirit such as Shelley's which chafed continually against its fetters. Shelley's imagination endows all inanimate forms with life but his predilection is for those possessed of seemingly individual powers of movement. It may be that the animating process was intuitive with him; it may also have had its philosophic justification, for self-created motion has been believed in some philosophies to be the distinctive quality of mind. Mind animates and moves. It requires no great imagination to fancy that all which moves, even to a wind-blown leaf, is possessed of soul and individuality. Shelley's pantheism emphasizes the multiplicity rather than the unity of life. One so individualistic as he, so desirous of freedom, naturally would so interpret the universe of finite forms. Clouds, among the ever-present, beautiful, and mutable phenomena of nature, had therefore a frequent place in his poetry.

The poem *The Cloud* is seemingly a by-product of *Prometheus*, a creation of the same imaginings which produced the longer poem. It is possible that he originally designed it as a part of *Prometheus* but that as it grew under his hands he wisely decided to publish it as a poem in itself. The same atmospheric phenomena and the same knowledge of electricity and chemistry are displayed in it as in *Prometheus*. The water-vapor drawn by the sun from the sea is electrically gathered in clouds, moves at the command of the lightning, and is dissolved again into the life-giving rains. Though in a process of perpetual change and seemingly, at times, destroyed, the cloud is immortal, for the round of its creation and dissolution is endless. Shelley elaborates the theme with much ingenuity, with beautiful color effects and varied imagery, but the essential facts

under the fanciful dress are sound. It is good meteorology. Therefore it is an excellent brief instance of Shelley's poetic processes, his ability to raise a beautiful and imaginative superstructure upon a basis of fact. It is this basis which is too frequently overlooked in the criticism of his verse. The mind which created *The Cloud* had for such poems as *Prometheus* and *The Witch of Atlas* a similar foundation of hard intellectual content.

*The Sensitive Plant*, composed in the early spring of 1820, was published in the *Prometheus* volume. Though clearly mystical and Platonistic, there is not, so far as I am aware, any certain key to this poem, no declaration by Shelley of any allegorical purpose. Nor does it employ much of the neo-Platonic symbolism so manifest in *Prometheus* and *The Witch of Atlas*. My guess as to its meaning has, therefore, to be based on analogies to other poems. It is possible that there is beneath its simple-seeming story a much profounder meaning than I can extract. If so, it must remain for someone else to decipher. I go on the assumption that if there are no clear hints as to a concealed meaning, and if a superficial meaning is adequate, there is no need to seek farther. That is not to say, however, that the poem is wholly as it appears. Mystical poetry has always its difficulties.

The mystical character of the poem is evident from its concluding stanzas.

... in this life  
Of error, ignorance and strife,  
Where nothing is, but all things seem  
And we the shadows of the dream,

It is a modest creed, and yet  
Pleasant, if one considers it,  
To own that death itself must be,  
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,  
And all sweet shapes and odors there  
In truth have never passed away:  
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,  
There is no death nor change: their might  
Exceeds our organs, which endure  
No light, being themselves obscure.

This seemingly says, what elsewhere is to be inferred of Shelley's matured philosophy, that mind is the sole reality. We perceive only what it is in us to perceive. The death of beauty is the death within us of the sense of beauty. This, though false in the literal sense, the sense in which a flower dies to sight and touch, is subjectively true in the sense that we perceive beauty only as the power within us exists. Also that this power in us may fade and die.

It is possible to read into the poem a lament for the decay of the poetic power of perception such as Wordsworth records in the *Ode on Intimations*. Shelley may record such a decay as intellectually foreseen only, for there is no indication that his own power of intuition had waned. Yet in a kindred sense it seems to me truly personal and autobiographical. Is not the Lady of the garden but another of Shelley's idealizations of Intellectual Beauty who appears in so many guises from Queen Mab to the Witch of the *Witch of Atlas*? He was forever haunted by this sense of a loveliness felt but unperceived, a delight which beckoned and was never possessed. The Sensitive Plant, the poet himself, once ministered to by visions of love and beauty, has been so worn by the "error, ignorance and strife" of earthly existence that the fair garden of his imagination has been laid desolate as was the Lady's garden by death and the winter storms. These related and not inconsistent meanings each reader must elaborate for himself. I would merely point out the underlying mystical concept of imagination as the creative force of existence. We suffer our unreal world of "error, ignorance and strife" to deface and destroy the real world of love and beauty in which we might dwell if we would.

The lover of Shelley will be struck, I think, in a consecutive reading of his work and following his evolution from materialism to mysticism, by one rather strange fact. His growing faith in a mystical interpretation of the universe is not accompanied, as might be expected, by any weakened grasp upon the world of actuality, the world which we falsely assert to be "real." *The Sensitive Plant* bears witness to Shelley's clear perception of the world of physical actuality. Nowhere in his work can be found a more exact rendering of physical phenomena. Each flower, each natural fact, is delineated with the utmost precision. A sense of the unseen world, a belief in the reality of mind, did not weaken his grasp of the phenomenal world but seems rather to have made it firmer. I do not recall that Shelley has noted the fact in himself unless his apology for *Epipsychidion* may be so read, yet in terms of the philosophy of Spinoza, whom he admired, Shelley

might well have reconciled his adherence to mysticism and his scientific perceptions of the objective universe. Spinoza would declare both to be true. A belief in one does not preclude a belief in the other. Both, therefore, are real, for each is one mode of expression of the universe, or the universal mind, which is God. God, in the doctrine of Spinoza, expresses himself in an infinite number of ways all equally real, for all are modes of thought. Shelley's poem so interpreted would merely express the difficulty in such a world as ours of perceiving more than the one dominant mode of expression, that manifest in "error, ignorance and strife."

The *Ode to Heaven* is ascribed to December, 1819. Mrs. Shelley's comment gives some notion of its character: "Shelley was a disciple of the immaterial philosophy of Berkeley. This theory gave unity and grandeur to his ideas, while it opened a wide field for his imagination. The creation, such as it was perceived by his mind—a unit in immensity, was slight and narrow compared with the interminable forms of thought that might exist beyond, to be perceived perhaps hereafter by his own mind; all of which are perceptible to other minds that fill the universe, not of space in the material sense, but of infinity in the immaterial one." The resemblances are equally to Spinoza with his conception of the infinite modes in which the divine mind expresses itself, the infinite number of planes which exist within Heaven, which is the sum of them all. The universe is thought of as one, the One, perhaps, of neo-Platonic thought. Human perception is confined, petty, is "but the mind's first chamber." The stanza may be cited as a whole to convey the poem's central thought.

Thou art but the mind's first chamber,  
Round which its young fancies clamber,  
Like weak insects in a cave,  
Lighted up by stalactites;  
But the portal of the grave,  
Where a world of new delights  
Will make thy best glories seem  
But a dim and noonday gleam  
From the shadow of a dream!

The idea is, of course, Platonic also. Berkeley, Spinoza, Plato, Plotinus—there is kinship among them. The *Ode to Heaven* derives from the mystical belief common to all of them, that earthly life is but a part, a trivial part, of the divine whole. Shelley's hunger for a deeper reality, a diviner way of life, is evident. His dissatisfaction with the



ways of earth and his own unhappy existence accounts for the choice of theme and the philosophy which it expresses.

*A Vision of the Sea*, written in the spring of 1820 and published with *Prometheus*, is seemingly descriptive only, a description which in its story of shipwreck and storm is expressive of the cruelty and remorselessness of the sea. Whether it has some hidden, some symbolical meaning, does not appear. I judge it to be no more than it seems, an expression of that horror of the destructiveness of natural forces which Shelley could not forget and which alternates with his mystical faith in the ultimate powers of beauty and goodness in the world. In *Prometheus* he had endeavored philosophically to define the subordinate place of evil in the scheme of things and its conquest by the spirit of love. Still he is haunted by a sense of horror. Evil, if only the creation of the mind, is nevertheless real. To destroy it is not easy. Seemingly the sense of it from time to time overcomes Shelley's belief in mystical philosophy. His *Vision of the Sea* is an instance of this alternative mood. *To a Skylark* and the *Ode to the West Wind* are popular no doubt because of his avoidance in them of evil and the horrible. Yet in them, even, is an undercurrent of dejection:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

In the *West Wind* he implores the strength of the wind to raise him from the "thorns of life." He desires the strength of the wind that his "dead thoughts" may be driven over the universe "like withered leaves." What thoughts? Those that will be prophetic of a reawakened earth, his philosophy of man's conquest of evil in himself and in human institutions. It is Shelley's despairing prayer that his work and his suffering may not be wholly in vain.

What are these dead thoughts is shown in his *Ode of October*, 1819, exhorting the Spaniards to arise and gain their freedom, and in the *Ode to Liberty*, also published in the *Prometheus* volume. The *Ode to the Spaniards*, though an eloquent, is a somewhat general call to those enslaved to unseat their conquerors, with the admonition that in victory they overthrow in themselves also the passions of revenge, pride, and power. The *Ode to Liberty* is a much longer and more elaborate production; containing, as it does, passages which throw light upon Shelley's thought, it demands much fuller examination than those poems upon the same theme which are wholly lyrical. It is essentially a philosophical poem.†

I have remarked in a discussion of *Prometheus Unbound* that one of the philosophic perplexities of the poem is an apparent belief in a

Saturnian age of innocence irreconcilable with an evolutionary philosophy which premises man's rise from the brute. (The acceptance of the mythical golden age must, in that poem, have been a concession to its fabular scheme, for in the *Ode to Liberty*, which is of the same period of composition, Shelley depicts man's early state as one of brutality and war!)

...but power from worst producing worse,  
The spirit of the beasts was kindled there,  
And of the birds, and of the watery forms,  
And there was war among them, and despair  
Within them, raging without truce or terms.  
The bosom of their violated nurse  
Groaned, for beasts warred on beasts, and worms on worms,  
And men on men; each heart was as a hell of storms. ✓

This is a description of man's "natural State" in accord not with that usually ascribed to Rousseau but with the belief of Hobbes that the life of man in the state of nature was "nasty, brutish, and short." And so man's abject state continued during the early stages of an organized society wherein,

This human living multitude  
Was savage, cunning, blind, and rude,

ruled over by Tyranny.

... beneath, sate deified  
The sister-pest, congregator of slaves;  
Into the shadow of her pinions wide  
Anarchs and priests who feed on gold and blood.

Primitive man and man of early recorded history was, then, both brutalized and enslaved.

Such was the life of man before the coming of the spirit of liberty which was born when Athens arose:

... Athens diviner yet,  
Gleamed with its crest of columns, on the will  
Of man, as on a mount of diamond, set;  
For thou wert, and thine all-creative skill  
Peopled, with forms that mock the eternal dead  
In marble immortality, that hill  
Which was thine earliest throne and latest oracle.

## The Living Voice of Athens

Within the surface of Time's fleeting river  
 Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay  
 Immovably unquiet, and for ever  
 It trembles, but it cannot pass away!

The voice of Athens still lives:

Religion veils her eyes; Oppression shrinks aghast.

One ocean feeds the clouds, and streams, and dew;  
 One sun illumines heaven; one spirit vast  
 With life and love makes chaos ever new,  
 As Athens doth the world with thy delight renew.

The familiar imagery of ocean, rain, and dew employed in *Prometheus* is here used to like effect. The figure likens the universal spirit of life and love to the sun and to the ocean. And as this spirit enlightens chaos so does Athens the world with the spirit of liberty.

Rome, too, for a time felt the spirit of liberty until "gold profaned thy Capitolian throne." Thereat liberty deserted man, for it was unknown to Scald and Druid; with Christianity,

The Galilean serpent forth did creep,  
 And made thy world an undistinguishable heap.

For a thousand years liberty dwelt in exile—

And then the shadow of thy coming fell  
 On Saxon Alfred's olive-cinctured brow.

In Italy, also, the spirit of liberty rose anew and was manifest in "Art, which cannot die." Luther, and England's prophets, and blind Milton also "caught thy wakening glance," presage of the new day. The French Revolution came, whose fruit—

Destruction's sceptred slaves, and Folly's mitred brood

endeavored to destroy until driven off by one like them but mightier, Bonaparte. Now England, though "called of old," sleeps. "Spain calls her now." Greece, too, is awake. He calls upon these two to appeal—

To the eternal years enthroned before us  
 In the dim West....

The allusion is clearly to America wherein the English may see the prophecy of their own destiny. To Germany also he appeals, and to Italy,

....lost Paradise of this divine  
And glorious world! thou flowery wilderness!  
Thou island of eternity!

The figures, 'flowery wilderness' and 'island,' are those which Asia employs descriptive of the Paradises in the world of preëxistence, bright places of delight amid the sea of universal being.

Stanzas 15 and 16 Shelley gave Peacock permission to alter by inserting asterisks should the publisher object to the expressions contemptuous of kings and priests which he there employed:

Oh, that the free would stamp the impious name  
Of King into the dust!

. . . . .  
The sound has poison in it, 'tis the sperm  
Of what makes life foul, cankerous, and abhorred.

So, too, with the name of Priest:

Oh, that the wise from their bright minds would kindle  
Such lamps within the dome of this dim world,  
That the pale name of Priest might shrink and dwindle  
Into the hell from which it first was hurled,  
A scoff of impious pride from fiends impure;  
Till human thoughts might kneel alone,  
Each before the judgment-throne  
Of its own aweless soul, or of the power unknown!

(The conjunction of the individual soul with the "power unknown" as the source of divinity is in accord with the philosophy, neo-Platonic in derivation, which Shelley more elaborately expresses in *Prometheus Unbound*. Therein liberated humanity becomes itself God, having by its attainment of freedom through love, become reunited with the One, which is the ultimate power of the universe. Soul or conscience and the "unknown power" are thus in reality one, alternative names of the same force, Love.)

The poem resumes in the same philosophic strain as that of *Julian and Maddalo* and *Prometheus Unbound*:

He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever  
Can be between the cradle and the grave  
Crowned him the King of Life. Oh vain endeavor!  
If on his own high will, a willing slave,  
He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor.

Man, endowed to conquer the universe, is in danger to enslavement only to his own thoughts. He is free only as he makes himself free. He can enslave himself to oppressors which he himself has created from his own mind. This insistence upon the deliberate exercise of the will and his realization that custom, tradition, superstition, and belief, though made by man, can enslave him if he is not wary is, from Shelley's insistence upon it, the cardinal point of his matured philosophy. What worth, he asks, is man's control of nature and his ability to supply his wants, and of what avail is Art,

... if Life can breed  
New wants, and wealth from those who toil and groan  
Rend of thy gifts and hers a thousand-fold for one.

The increase of wealth and the increase of numbers in man are valueless in themselves. Only as man exercises his potential powers, his freedom of the will, can he make of life a joyous thing. Shelley invokes freedom:

Come thou, but lead out of the inmost cave  
Of man's deep spirit, as the morning-star  
Beckons the sun from the Eoan Wave,  
Wisdom.

Wisdom must be evoked from man himself. Liberty can be such only when conjoined with Wisdom and the "rulers of eternal thought" among which are "Blind Love, and equal Justice." Liberty, then, and all good things must come from man himself, from the Wisdom which he can find only in himself.

## CHAPTER XIV

### "*The Steps of Liberty*"



AN appropriate chapter heading for the letters of the period which covers the poems to liberty and others yet to be taken up in their due place would be a stanza from Shelley's *National Anthem*, product of 1819 but not published until 1839. It has never, I believe, been considered as a substitute for "God Save the King," a fact which demonstrates how far Shelley still is in advance of his countrymen. As it is a poem doubtless unfamiliar to many readers of Shelley, I shall quote the first three of its six stanzas. The resemblance of its thought to that of the *Ode to Liberty* discussed in the last chapter is apparent.

God prosper, speed and save,  
God raise from England's grave  
Her murdered Queen!  
Pave with swift victory  
The steps of Liberty,  
Whom Britons own to be  
Immortal Queen.

See, she comes throned on high,  
On swift Eternity,  
God save the Queen!  
Millions on millions wait  
Firm, rapid, and elate,  
On her majestic state!  
God save the Queen!

She is thine own pure soul  
Moulding the mighty whole,—  
God save the Queen!  
She is thine own deep love  
Rained down from heaven above,—  
Wherever she rest or move,  
God save our Queen!

There is no evidence that this was written in a mood of humor or even irony but rather in the deepest seriousness. National anthems of this character are not yet fashionable.

<sup>1</sup> The letters of the last months of 1819 have much to do with politics though there are occasional interesting passages of a purely literary character.<sup>2</sup> Thus a brief comment on *The Cenci* and Peacock, (October 13): "I have just heard from Peacock, saying, that he don't think that my tragedy will do, and that he don't much like it. But I ought to say, to blunt the edge of his criticism, that he is a nursling of the exact and superficial school in poetry." *The Cenci*, which he had had printed in Italy, he was sending at this time to his publishers, the Olliers, and with it, in MS, "The 'Prometheus', a poem in my best style, whatever that may amount to. . . . It is the most perfect of my productions." In the letter which records this comment (October 15) is a note also upon the *Quarterly Review's* attack on *The Revolt of Islam* in its April issue, 1819. The review was written by Sir John Taylor Coleridge, with whom Shelley went to school at Eton, and though stupid and absurd, was none the less harmful to Shelley's reputation. Shelley thought the article had been written by Southey: "The only remark worth notice in this piece is the assertion that I imitate Wordsworth. It may as well be said that Lord Byron imitates Wordsworth, or that Wordsworth imitates Lord Byron, both being great poets, and deriving from the new springs of thought and feeling, which the great events of our age have exposed to view, a similar tone of sentiment, imagery, and expression. A certain similarity all the best writers of any particular age inevitably are marked with, from the spirit of that age acting on all."

To Leigh Hunt Shelley owed the rare experience of receiving the courageous defense and praise offered by a friend in his behalf. Hunt in *The Examiner* for October 10, 1819, replied to the absurd charges made by the *Quarterly*, defending the purity and austerity of Shelley's life. The *Quarterly* reviewer had declared that Shelley was "shamefully dissolute in his conduct." Shelley in a letter of November 2 thanks Hunt for his good offices and sends him "a *very heroic* poem, which I wish you to give to Ollier, and desire him to print and publish immediately." The poem was *Peter Bell the Third*, which was not, however, published until 1840. The verses Shelley says are only a "party squib" upon which he has expended little pains.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Shelley tells us that nothing personal was intended in the poem, that Shelley was personally unacquainted with Wordsworth and "no man ever admired Wordsworth's poetry more." Shelley, she says, "Conceived the idealism of a poet—a man of lofty and creative genius—quitting the glorious calling of discovering and announcing the beautiful and good, to support and propagate ignorant prejudices

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and pernicious errors; imparting to the unenlightened, not that ardor for truth and spirit of toleration which Shelley looked on as the sources of the moral improvement and happiness of mankind; but false and injurious opinions, that evil was good, and that ignorance and force were the best allies of purity and virtue." Shelley believed that a poet who thus renounced his heritage would become afflicted with dulness, and so he portrays Peter, who enlists under the Devil's banner, is duly rewarded therefor, and infects the whole countryside with a prodigious dulness. It is shrewd satire and hits very near the truth, for it is obvious that Wordsworth's loss of inspiration coincides with his growing conservatism and acceptance of the world. Shelley's satire, however, is a lively thing written with much deftness and facility. It is amusing, rather surprisingly so, for Shelley shows only occasional flashes of humor in his letters. The truth, perhaps, is that his native sense of humor was as keen as another's but that mostly it was overlaid with too great a sense of the pain of life. One who was as a nerve to feel "the else unfelt oppressions of this earth" could not often be in a humorous mood when he set himself to the business of composition. In his private life, Mrs. Shelley says, he was often light-hearted and gay.

The poem has indeed at times rather a grisly than a kindly gaiety. The description of Hell as "a city much like London" is of this order. A few stanzas are illustrative:

Hell is a city much like London—  
 A populous and a smoky city;  
 There are all sorts of people undone,  
 And there is little or no fun done;  
 Small justice shown, and still less pity.

There is a Castles, and a Canning,  
 A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh;  
 All sorts of caitiff corpses planning  
 All sorts of cozening for trepanning  
 Corpses less corrupt than they.

. . . . .  
 And this is Hell—and in this smother  
 Are all damnable and damned;  
 Each one, damning, damns the other;  
 They are damned by one another,  
 By none other are they damned.



## Wordsworth the Moral Eunuch

The rich are damned, beyond all cure,  
 To taunt, and starve, and trample on  
 The weak and wretched; and the poor  
 Damn their broken hearts to endure  
 Stripe on stripe, with groan on groan.

This, if humor, as I suppose it is, is of a macabre sort.

The passages on Wordsworth are more truly amusing and their criticism sharp:

But from the first 'twas Peter's drift  
 To be a kind of moral eunuch;  
 He touched the hem of Nature's shift,  
 Felt faint—and never dared uplift  
 The closest, all-concealing tunic.

She laughed the while, with an arch smile,  
 And kissed him with a sister's kiss,  
 And said—"My best Diogenes,  
 I love you well, but, if you please,  
 Tempt not again my deepest bliss.

"'Tis you are cold—for I, not coy,  
 Yield love for love, frank, warm, and true;  
 And Burns, a Scottish peasant boy—  
 His errors prove it—knew my joy  
 More, learnèd friend, than you."

There are passages alluding to Coleridge, "a mighty poet" who understood all things but his own mind; and upon Born's translation of Kant, "five thousand crammed octavo pages."

I looked on them nine several days,  
 And then I saw that they were bad;  
 A friend, too, spoke in their dispraise,—  
 He never read them; with amaze  
 I found Sir William Drummond had.

The lines perhaps explain a dispensation which most Shelleyan critics will account blessed.

It will be needless to give a full account of Peter's fortunes. Damned at first by the reviews, he no sooner changed his note and ceased to be critical of his country's dying state than he was applauded:

Yet the Reviews, who heaped abuse  
On Peter while he wrote for freedom,  
So soon as in his song they spy  
The folly which soothes tyranny,  
Praise him, for those who feed 'em.

Peter writes odes to the Devil:

"May death and damnation  
And consternation,  
Flit up from Hell with pure intent!  
Slash them at Manchester,  
Glasgow, Leeds, and Chester;  
Drench all with blood from Avon to Trent."

So Peter is given a sinecure and becomes prosperous. But he pays the price for wealth and respectability:

Peter was dull—he was at first  
Dull—oh, so dull—so very dull!  
Whether he talked, wrote, or rehearsed—  
Still with his dulness was he cursed—  
Dull—beyond all conception—dull.

If this be considered unjust criticism at the time of writing, it must be admitted excellent prophecy, for Wordsworth was yet to write his "Ecclesiastical Sonnets."

The description of Hell as London is not wholly pertinent to Shelley's purpose of satirizing Wordsworth. It is brought in because Shelley cannot avert his mind from the cruelty and tyranny of life even in a poem with a lighter theme. The fact argues the presence of an obsession which tightened its grip upon him to the last. It is to be glimpsed in almost every poem. There is an undercurrent of sadness and rebellion. To the critical understanding of Shelley the recognition of this truth is essential. It is the key to his conduct, the key to his choice of subjects, and the key to his treatment of them. Mrs. Shelley's note on the poems of 1819 states the preoccupation of Shelley's mind, though coldly and, as one might say, perfunctorily: "Though Shelley's first eager desire to excite his countrymen to resist openly the oppressions existent during 'the good old times' had faded with early youth, still his warmest sympathies were for the people. He was a republican, and loved a democracy. He looked on all human beings as inheriting an equal right to possess the dearest privileges of

our nature, the necessities of life, when fairly earned by labour, and intellectual instruction. His hatred of any despotism, that looked upon the people as not to be consulted or protected from want and ignorance, was intense. He was residing near Leghorn, at Villa Valsovano, writing *The Cenci*, when the news of the Manchester Massacre reached us; it roused in him violent emotions of indignation and compassion. The great truth that the many, if accordant and resolute, could control the few, as was shown some years after, made him long to teach his injured countrymen how to resist. Inspired by these feelings, he wrote the *Masque of Anarchy*, which he sent to his friend, Leigh Hunt, to be inserted in the *Examiner*, of which he was then the Editor."

Hunt, believing its publication unwise at the time, did not release it until the year of the Reform Parliament, 1832. Inasmuch as he, rather than Shelley, would have borne any legal attack, which in the temper of the day was not impossible, his decision was probably wise. He can, at any rate, in view of his record, scarcely be charged with timidity. The poem does not mince words or avoid names:

I met murder on the way—  
He had a mask like Castlereagh;  
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;  
Seven bloodhounds followed him.

. . . . .

Next came Fraud, and he had on,  
Like Eldon, an ermined gown;  
His big tears, for he wept well,  
Turned to mill-stones as they fell;

. . . . .

Like Sidmouth, next Hypocrisy  
On a crocodile rode by.

In the "ghastly masquerade" which precedes *Anarchy* on his white horse are many Destructions—

All disguised, even to the eyes,  
Like bishops, lawyers, peers or spies.

That all are anarchists, trampling on the law of the land and enslaving its people, is explicitly said. The charge is made in no abstract terms. The forces of fraud and corruption in high places, the true upholders of anarchy, starve and enslave the masses:

"Asses, swine, have litter spread,  
And with fitting food are fed;  
All things have a home but one—  
Thou, O Englishman, hast none!

"This is slavery; savage men,  
Or wild beasts within a den,  
Would endure not as ye do—  
But such ills they never knew."

What then is freedom? Freedom is bread for the worker "in a neat and happy home." It is "clothes, and fire and food." It is a check upon the tyranny practiced by the rich. It is justice, wisdom, and peace. It is love, and its lamps are science, poetry and thought. Freedom, to Shelley, was no abstraction but the right and the opportunity for all to live the good life. How precisely, with evil and selfishness in power, with the law unjustly administered, is it to be obtained? Shelley does not evade the problem. If the law does not protect the poor and the oppressed met to declare their right to freedom, then there is nothing to do but passively to resist:

"Stand ye calm and resolute,  
Like a forest close and mute,  
With folded arms, and looks which are  
Weapons of unvanquished war.

. . . . .

"And if then the tyrants dare,  
Let them ride among you there,  
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew;  
What they like, that let them do.

"With folded arms and steady eyes,  
And little fear, and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay,  
Till their rage has died away."

Shelley did not evade the logical consequence of his own beliefs. Distrusting violence and bloodshed and yet believing in reform, in peaceful revolution, there was but one weapon for its attainment to which he could turn—passive resistance. He believed that shame in killing the unarmed and the unresisting would break the spirits of the oppressors and liberty would be won.

## The Call to Violence

So, at least, he declares himself in *The Mask of Anarchy* which, if not written in the spirit of Christ, seems intellectually at least to recognize the spiritual force of nonresistance. Other of his political poems written at the time of the Manchester Massacre and published not until 1832 or later breathe a less Christian spirit. That Shelley was capable of personal hatred was shown in the poem of 1817 addressed to the Lord Chancellor. He says, indeed, "I curse thee, though I hate thee not." The curse carries more conviction than the disclaimer of hate. He desired to void the hate which gathered in him, and the very writing of the poem itself aided him to do so, but it would be idle to declare that he had wholly forgiven his enemy. Similarly *Lines Written During the Castlereagh Administration* are written in no spirit of love. Witness the concluding stanza:

Ay, marry thy ghastly wife!  
 Let Fear and Disquiet and Strife  
 Spread thy couch in the chamber of Life;  
 Marry Ruin, thou Tyrant! and Hell be thy guide  
 To the bed of the bride!

This is written neither in an amiable mood nor in that high impersonal mood which loathes the sin and forgives the sinner. Nor does he express faith in the triumphs of the spirit. In *Song to the Men of England* he implies that violence must be met by violence:

Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap;  
 Find Wealth,—let no impostor heap;  
 Weave robes,—let not the idle wear;  
 Forge arms,—in your defence to bear.

This surely is a call to armed resistance. Yet in the end his tone is one of hopelessness.

With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,  
 Trace your grave, and build your tomb,  
 And weave your winding-sheet, till fair  
 England be your sepulchre.

In *To Sidmouth and Castlereagh* Shelley pours out his invective upon these enemies of liberty in words scarcely to be surpassed in the intensity of their loathing. These are the concluding stanzas:

As a shark and dog-fish wait  
Under an Atlantic isle,  
For the Negro-ship, whose freight  
Is the theme of their debate,  
Wrinkling their red gills the while—

Are ye, two vultures sick for battle,  
Two scorpions under one wet stone,  
Two bloodless wolves whose dry throats rattle,  
Two crows perched on the murrained cattle,  
Two vipers tangled into one.

The dignified sonnet *England in 1819* reaches a higher poetic level. The anger and hatred which animate it have the power which comes from self-mastery. Four lines will suffice to show its character.

Rulers, who neither see, nor feel, nor know,  
But leech-like to their fainting country cling,  
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow;  
A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field.

Here, it may be said, his hatred is of wrong and injustice rather than of the individual perpetrators of evil.

✓The question which remains to be answered, a question implicit in Shelley's political verse, is that also which is crucial in the philosophy of *Prometheus Unbound* and which explains, I believe, in *The Cenci*, Shelley's choice of his subject. All in one way or another deal with the problem of evil in the world, individual evil and social evil. The problem is two-fold: there is the metaphysical problem of what evil is and how it has come to be, and the practical problem of its expulsion from an improved human society. Shelley in his youthful assurance had declared that "We see virtue and vice, distinct; the line which divides them is glaringly perceptible." Unfortunately, or fortunately, it does not remain so. Virtue, for the thoughtful, is no easy matter even with the utmost desire therefor. Nor is it possible, as Shelley believed in his early simple faith in rationalism, to convert the world by logic. The springs to action are not controlled by the intellect but by the emotions. There is an occasional rare bird, like Shelley himself, who is capable of debating without heat and who can be converted by argument to a new belief. But these are so few as to be, politically speaking, negligible. Conduct arises from emotion. To revolutionize a man's life you must convert him in a religious sense.

He must be emotionally reborn. The reason has its uses, of course; it is a tool, but only that.

Evil, then, is for the mature mind no easy problem. Even to perceive its complexity is a mark of intellectual emancipation. There are no doubt simple souls "who do God's work and know it not" but such are of little use in attacking the complicated machinery of the state, of the law, of industry. Conscience is here no infallible guide. Nor is the alternative course of conduct to the one rejected, even in a simple moral dilemma, necessarily one which can be approved. Antigone must go against her conscience whichever choice she makes and the choice is inescapable. How refrain from sin when all possible actions and even to refrain from acting are in their degree sinful? It is a question of less or more. These speculations lead to other and deeper ones. They lead to theology and to the most attenuated metaphysics. Such Shelley brought to bear on certain aspects of the problem in *Prometheus Unbound*. There he has laid the source of evil within the mind of humanity itself. Humanity as a whole create evil and the god who personifies it. Their ills, of their own making, spring from the spirit of hate, not of love. When men enter into the spirit of love and forgive evil not only in others but in themselves, then a regenerate world is possible and the Golden Age returns. Shelley thus far has accepted the spirit of Christ and a belief in the return of good for evil as a means to the conquest of evil. In advocating passive resistance to tyranny, he seems, as I remarked, to adopt the same principle as of technical value in the business of social revolution.

These instances illustrate Shelley's metaphysical solution of evil as something to be destroyed within the race as a whole through the growing power of love; and his rejection of violence as a mass measure in social revolution. The problem of individual conduct in the presence of evil, the choice of Antigone, remains. And the nature of evil itself remains. It does not suffice to explain it as the absence of love or as positive hate. How does it come to be? What essentially informs it? And how must the individual confronting it behave? Must he resist it and, if so, how? These questions are all implicit in *The Cenci* and partly explain Shelley's choice of the theme. Beatrice Cenci, spiritually beautiful, is encompassed about with evil. Church and state afford her no aid. She is alone but for those weaker than herself and dependent upon her. Nor is the evil to be turned aside by innocence and spiritual purity. Innocence and purity do not suffice to protect either men or women or children from dreadful fates. Evil

is stronger than they. They suffer and are destroyed and evil triumphs. Nor is it sure that the stings of conscience avenge the victim on his persecutor. The more powerful the evil-doer the less subject is he to remorse.

Shelley's realistic temper is shown in the resolution with which he makes himself face facts. For one with his imagination, who can so easily escape into a cloudland of his own creating, the temptation to remain there and forever shut away the pain of life must have been very great. It is a dissipation which he permits himself only at intervals, driven thereto by a sense of his own impotence such as he felt especially in Italy. Even so, *The Witch of Atlas* is offset by *The Cenci*. Trelawny's statement as to Shelley's purpose in the drama is taken from the poet's conversation: "In writing *The Cenci* my object was to see how I could succeed in describing passions I have never felt, and to tell the most dreadful story in pure and refined language. The image of Beatrice haunted me after seeing her portrait. The story is well authenticated, and the details far more horrible than I have painted them. *The Cenci* is a work of art; it is not colored by my feelings nor obscured by my metaphysics. I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length." Many things might be said of his statement but to me the most interesting sentence in it is this: "my object was to see how I could succeed in describing passions I have never felt, and to tell the most dreadful story in pure and refined language." Only a strong mind can hold itself to so repugnant a task and a great poetic talent extract beauty from it. His choice of the theme was deliberate. The decision which he had made in *Alastor* not to court the spirit of solitude and escape is in this renewed. And it was renewed, I think, with no certainty that complete evil so envisaged could be fitted into any philosophical scheme he had yet devised or could devise.

There were reasons why his mind, forcing itself to face facts, should find in *The Cenci* story a theme which appealed to it. A line from one of Camillo's speeches gives the clue:

In the great war between the old and young.

Such is the war waged between Count Cenci and his children. Shelley in terms more civilized, less physically harsh, had waged such a war with his own father who, in another age, would have exercised a tyranny as great as Count Cenci's with whatever less degree of sheer wickedness. The paternal parallel was sufficiently there. But more, for Shelley was aware of the danger of dwelling on wrongs done only



to himself, the war of old and young was everywhere exemplified in the world about him, a world much like our own, in which the amenities of life had been destroyed by war and the subsequent tyrannies of a Europe precariously restored. Personal rights laboriously acquired over a long period of time proved invalid in the face of arbitrary power. Free speech and a free press were muzzled. Liberty, as Shelley declared, was dead. And the perpetrators of these acts, the tyrants and the oppressors, were old men like Castlereagh and Eldon. It was the young who suffered most, who were slaughtered in the incessant wars or whose lives were maimed and stultified by the iniquities of a reactionary peace. Europe in 1819 presented a picture very like that of Europe in 1919. Civilization had been set back fifty years. The elder statesmen played the diplomatic game of their masters, the royalties and aristocracies of Europe, and saw to it that the staggering burden of debt was placed on those least able to bear it. The old, the past, state, church, and law levied mortmain on youth and all that youth connotes of idealism, hopefulness, and the spirit of reform. "In the great war between the old and young," age had triumphed.

Shelley had said that *The Cenci* was devoid of propaganda and metaphysics. It is thus the more compelling in its freedom from conscious purpose. But the world it depicts is one of tyranny and of injustice sanctified by church and state. Count Cenci is a noble, he is wealthy; outwardly he conforms to the practices of the church. He may violate the law if not with impunity at least at the cost of bribery. His position gives him power and he is feared. So fortified by tradition, law, custom, wealth, and the prestige of position he is free to commit all the deviltry he chooses. He is answerable only to himself. Youth and innocence and right in their conflict with him are crushed, and soiled, and slain. Only murder can destroy him and those who undertake his removal are in turn destroyed by the state whose powers they had usurped. The story, if unusual in the degree of evil and depravity which it depicts, is nevertheless typical of tyranny and cruelty practiced upon the weak by power which is in fact, if not in theory, above all law whether civil or ecclesiastical. The vested interests of the old are too strong for the young, who have no strength but innocence and the passion of their revolt.

The strength of innocence is not enough. If good overcomes evil in the end, and there is no certainty that this is so, its victory is too late to benefit those who perished at the hands of evil and were without even the hope that their sacrifice was not in vain. Beatrice and her

companions, guilty of the righteous murder of Count Cenci, die at the executioner's hands calm and unrepentant. They have freed the world of a monster, but the church-state which protected him is unshaken and destroys the murderers as dangerous to itself. Shelley tells the story as he learned it from history, movingly, but with fine detachment and avoiding all sentimentality and falsification. Good struggles with evil and is overcome and destroyed. The forces which permitted this injustice remain as they were, unweakened.

How may the play be reconciled, then, with *Prometheus Unbound* in which Prometheus by repenting of the curse which he passed upon Jupiter overcomes Jupiter? Love and forgiveness are stronger than hate. But in *Prometheus* it is only after an unthinkable immensity of time that the conquest of evil is achieved. Christ crucified bequeaths his name to a world which employs it to sanctify bigotry, cruelty, and war. In the end his spirit prevails in Shelley's resolution of the conflict between Jupiter and Prometheus. It is a possible ending only, for Shelley implies that man is free to choose and there is no certainty what his choice may be. He will remain enslaved to the past, to evil, unless he realizes his power to liberate himself through the realization of the love within him. Beatrice Cenci is incapable of a love so great as that. Forgiveness so divine asks superhuman powers. For her to endure more than she has endured would be for her to lose her soul's integrity. As we follow her story we feel her act to be the only humanly possible one and we feel a satisfaction not so much in her vengeance as in the simple fact that Count Cenci will no longer work evil on this earth. She is a public benefactor. Nevertheless the state in turn destroys her and no good has been done except the removal of one evil man at great cost!

If *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound* be considered together as two solutions of the central problem of evil, the human and the divine, they are reconcilable seemingly in some such form as this: Only as humanity approaches the divine can it overcome the evil in itself. It must, therefore, attain divinity only through the divinity already existent in it. But are there intimations of the divine in man as he now is? And are these sufficiently strong? In his hopeful moments Shelley feels that man is capable of divinity and cites instances to support his faith. Not always is he so sure. In *The Cenci* he seems to say that there are experiences too harsh to be endured, wrongs which can humanly be answered only by wrong. Beatrice is a noble creature, capable of much love and forgiveness, but not superhuman. Perhaps the implication is that for her, and for others like her, death is the

only solution. They are not sufficiently strong, nor are any human beings sufficiently strong, to overcome earthly evils. Death for such is a release and a good whether or no it is a gateway to another and better world. It is evident that Shelley often so thought it and, though feeling it his duty while here to better human life and to exercise his own great poetic powers, looked forward impatiently for death, and, though refraining from suicide because of obligations to others, "did not strive officiously to keep alive." He tempted the fate by drowning which he intuitively felt would be his.†

What, then, did Shelley think evil to be? Not an unreality. In *Prometheus* his philosophy declares that all exists in mind, that thought is the sole reality. Yet this is not to deny the existence of evil, for thought may be evil. The attainment of divinity means the expulsion of evil thought by good. Evil is thus unthought, but the task is more than a form of words. It is a surrender of self to something greater than self, the subordination of the many to the One—in the terms of neo-Platonism. The evil in Count Cenci is his monstrous assertion of self, his subjection of all around him to his wicked desires. The pleasure which he derives from the pain he inflicts on others is his sense of power over them. His is a hypertrophy of self, of will. He triumphs over the law both of church and state, over the threat of enemies, and sneers even at the God to whom he does lip-service only as one perhaps stronger than himself. His emotions are lust, hate, and pride, a human realization of the devil as monstrous as any dramatic creation of the Elizabethans, but not insane by ordinary standards. His insanity is emotional not intellectual. His mind is powerful, cunning, lucid. He analyzes himself with the same acumen with which he perceives the weaknesses of mankind and plays upon them to his own purposes. To conceive of evil so great as Count Cenci's, to believe either in its existence or its power to destroy good, is beyond the capacity of weak well-meaning people. Shelley in Count Cenci, as Shakespeare in *Iago*, believed in the reality of fiends incarnate, and both, it is interesting to note, attribute evil to the desire for and the exercise of wanton power. *Iago* and Count Cenci in their little spheres desire to be as God.† Shelley's hatred of kings, and priests, and statesmen, his dream of an ultimate state of anarchism, in which every human being is free of all authority but that of love, has its roots deep in a moral intuition that to impose our wills upon others is to endanger our souls.†

† Liberty was the cardinal point of Shelley's social philosophy and the profoundest desire of his moral nature. He wished to be wholly

free himself and to see others equally free. Free thought, free speech, a free press, and uncensored books—only through these can society and the individual grow great and just and tolerant. It was a belief which was the foundation of a liberalism which produced many great men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and now is dying if not dead. Coercion, suppression, regimentation—all for excellent (and conflicting) purposes—are the practices of today. Shelley for all his radicalism would not have been at home in our world where radicals no less than conservatives believe in the suppression of minorities. No one ever believed more passionately than Shelley in the liberation of oppressed peoples and enslaved classes, but his goal was greater than that. He wished every individual to be free—politically, socially, economically, morally free. Life is nothing unless composed of free individuals realizing each the best that is in him. Shelley was no party man, no joiner. In his passionate desire for freedom he came to live a lonely life and with few friends. His life was tragic and unhappy. But he came as near the mental and spiritual freedom he sought as any one of whom we have record and so remains, transcending his work, a figure which all who love freedom instinctively look to and admire even without wholly understanding.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shelley's letter of November 3, 1819, to Hunt is one of his fullest expressions of opinion upon a question of public moment and illustrates his concern for that political principle for which he cared most—free speech. The letter was written upon news of the trial and conviction of Richard Carlile, publisher of free-thought books, for blasphemous libel. Shelley had not yet heard the severe punishment inflicted on the publisher—three years' imprisonment and a fine of £1500—or his indignation would have been even greater, if possible, than it was. Of the two books for whose publication Carlile was condemned, one was Paine's *Age of Reason*. For nearly thirty years the government had been endeavoring to suppress Paine's seditious and blasphemous works with the natural result of advertising them and arousing the interest of all potential radicals and heretics. The practical value of government persecution in thus fostering ideas to which he subscribed seems not to have occurred to Shelley. The conviction of Carlile was to him but another evidence of the evil days on which England had fallen, the last bulwarks of her liberty fast melting beneath the tide of despotism: "In the name of all we hope for in human nature what are the people of England about? or rather how long will they and those whose hereditary duty it is to lead them endure the enormous outrages of which they are one day made the

victim, and the next the instrument? Post succeeds post and fresh horrors are ever detailed. First we hear that a troop of the enraged master-manufacturers are let loose with sharpened swords upon their starving dependents; and in spite of the remonstrances of the regular troops that they ride over them and massacre without distinction of sex or age, and cut off women's breasts and dash the heads of infants against the stones. Then comes information that a man has been found guilty of some inexplicable crime, which his prosecutors call blasphemy, one of the features of which, they inform us, is the denying that the massacring of children was done by the immediate command of the author and preserver of all things."

Shelley's argument in his long letter is in considerable degree legalistic—such as the attorney for the accused may or may not have advanced. The jury, he contends with justice, was illegally constituted, for it was not composed of "peers" of the accused, for Carlile was a Deist and the jury were Christians. This Shelley argues is "to constitute a jury out of the men who are parties to the prosecution . . . to make those who are offended, judges of the cause of him, by whom they profess themselves to have been offended. . . . No honest Christian would sit on such a jury except he felt himself thoroughly imbued with the universal toleration preached by the alleged founder of his religion." Shelley elaborates on the impossibility of a fair trial before a jury incapable of rendering an impartial judgment and then asks why Mr. Carlile is singled out as a victim of the government's attack when it is notorious that many eminent men have been and are Deists. Justice should be impartial, but Mr. Carlile, a bookseller of small means, is prosecuted whereas Gibbon and Jeremy Bentham, and Hume, famous personages, were never tried for their heresies. Why, too, condemn Paine's works only and not others "more learned and systematically complete" than his? "Why crush a starving bookseller, and anathematize a work, which though perhaps perfect enough for its purpose must from the very circumstances of its composition be imperfect?" But tyrants, Shelley observes, "after all are only a kind of demagogues." They prefer not to risk defeat by attacking aristocratical Deists. "And the prosecutors care little for religion, or care for it only as the mask and the garment by which they are invested with the symbols of worldly power. In prosecuting Carlile, they have used the superstition of the jury as their instrument in crushing a political enemy, or rather they strike in his person at all their political enemies." A concluding passage suggests Shelley's program of practical reform: "Economy, retrenchment, the disbanding of the

standing army, the gradual abolition of the National Debt by some just yet speedy and effectual system, and such a reform in the representative system, and such a reform in the representation as by admitting the constitutional presence of the people in the State may prevent the recurrence of evils which now present us with the alternative of despotism or revolution, are the objects at which the jury unceremoniously struck when from a sentiment of religious intolerance they delivered a verdict of guilty against Mr. Carlile.”)

In a letter to the Gisbornes, November 6, Shelley expresses his apprehension of inflation and the loss to them of part or all of their small income. The national debt had grown enormously and to levy more taxes was impossible, for the country was on the verge of civil war: “Everything is preparing for a bloody struggle, in which, if the ministers succeed, they will assuredly diminish the interest of the national debt, for no combination of the heaviest tyranny can raise the taxes for its payment. If the people conquer, the public creditor will equally suffer; for it is monstrous to imagine that they will submit to the perpetual inheritance of a double aristocracy. They will perhaps find some crown and church lands, and appropriate the tithes to make a kind of compensation to the public creditor. They will confiscate the estates of their political enemies.” So complete a revolution did not ultimately occur but Shelley was not an alarmist in so predicting. Had the Duke of Wellington had his way and been permitted to follow the time-honored admonition to “shoot them down” civil war would have ensued. Shelley from afar followed the conflict as it could be inadequately glimpsed from a few newspapers and the letters of his English friends. He was preoccupied with it and presumably at this time composed his *A Philosophical View of Reform*, for a remark in his letter to the Gisbornes implies some such work: “I have deserted the odorous gardens of literature, to journey across the great sandy desert of politics.”)

Though left incomplete and not published until 1920, *A Philosophical View of Reform* is an important work for anyone who would understand Shelley’s political philosophy and the temper in which he approached the business of practical reforms. He has both a remote goal for society and also the realistic sense which apprehends the slow degrees by which a goal must be approached through alterations in political machinery and through the education of the electorate. There is nothing wild-eyed in his essay. He will seem to many even overcautious in his desire to test each step before going farther. The possibility of violent revolution he views with regret.

If it comes it will be forced on the masses from above by the stupidity of those who refuse to change with the times, those who admit nothing and concede nothing; a danger nevertheless very real, for aristocracies have seldom shown themselves amenable to reform save through force. A sentence which follows the statement of the parts into which his view of the subject falls indicates the philosophical temper in which he addresses his task: "Let us believe not only that *it* [change] is necessary because it is just and ought to be, but necessary because it is inevitable and must be." By this I understand him to mean that change of some sort is inevitable from the nature of things. The character of the change is for men to determine.

[The first of the three chapters into which the manuscript is divided traces rapidly the rise of modern despotism subsequent to the downfall of Rome. In this enslavement of mankind the Church played a large part.] "Names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture; and a system of liberty and equality—for such was the system planted by that great Reformer—was perverted to support oppression. Not his doctrines, for they are too simple and direct to be susceptible of such perversion, but the mere names." To the tyranny of the church the Italian republics and cities opposed effectual resistance for a time and it was to this freedom that Italy owed her early pre-eminence in the arts. "When this resistance was overpowered, as what resistance to fraud and tyranny has not been overpowered? another was even then maturing." This was the Reformation, which was marked by the rising of the poor "against their natural enemies, the rich. . . . So dear is power that the tyrants themselves neither then, nor now, nor ever, left or leave a path to freedom but through their own blood." In England the belated Renaissance, animated by the spirit of freedom, produced the great writers of the age of Elizabeth and James I. Then followed the struggles with the Crown and the "bringing to public justice one of those chiefs of a conspiracy of privileged murderers and robbers whose impunity had been the consecration of crime."

[The Revolution of 1688 established in theory the recognition of the Will of the People as the ultimate source of political power.] "*The will of the People to change their government is an acknowledged right in the Constitution of England.*" Again there was a revival of learning in the free spirit of inquiry. The social philosophers and the psychologists examined the nature of society and of the human mind, making inferences "most incompatible with the popular religions and

the established governments of Europe." The ideas of Berkeley, Hume, and Hartley, popularized by the French revolutionary writers, were made an instrument of political reform. Political philosophy arose, deriving from its parent metaphysics. "What would Swift and Bolingbroke and Sidney and Locke and Montesquieu, or even Rousseau, not to speak of political philosophers of our own age, Godwin and Bentham, have been but for Lord Bacon, Montaigne and Spinoza, and the other great luminaries of the preceding epoch?" That Shelley should recognize this dependence of an applied, a political, philosophy upon a deeper metaphysics is evidence of his calibre as a political thinker and, were it needed, proof that in tracing the history of his thought it is necessary to relate his social, political, and moral beliefs to their origins in the great philosophies. Nor is it less true that his poetry, likewise, has its roots in philosophy, whether social, scientific, or mystical. It is Shelley's belief repeatedly stated that a free society expresses itself in the greatness of its philosophy and that from this philosophy spring poetry, science, and improved political and economic institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Shelley perceived that his own age, despite its political obscurantism, was a wave of the Renaissance, that in philosophy, poetry, and the arts and sciences it felt a reanimating energy. The Utilitarian philosophy he believed an addition to social philosophy and there were besides, "many new theories, more or less perfect, but all superior to the mass of evil which they would supplant." The United States in its novel form of government afforded the most triumphant expression of the new liberal spirit animating the age, "sufficiently remote" as it was, "from the accuracy of ideal excellence." Shelley commends under a misapprehension what was once proposed as a principle of the American Constitution but which was defeated. "It [the U. S.] constitutionally acknowledges the progress of human improvement, and is framed under the limitation of the probability of more simple views of political science being rendered applicable to human life. There is a law by which the Constitution is reserved for revision every ten years. Every other set of men who have assumed the office of legislation, and framing institutions for future ages, with far less right to such an assumption than the founders of the American Republic, *regarded* their work as the wisest and the best that could possibly have been produced: these illustrious men looked upon the past history of their species and saw that it was the history of his mistakes, and his sufferings arising from his mistakes; they observed the superiority of their own work to all the works which had pre-



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ceded it, and they judged it possible that other political institutions would be discovered having the same relation to those which they had established which they bear to those which have preceded them. They provided therefore for the application of these contingent discoveries to the social state without the violence and misery attendant upon such change in less modest and more imperfect governments." The American reader must, alas, hang his head in shame before this unwarranted praise, knowing that those who framed the amending clause of our Constitution succeeded in doing precisely the opposite of that which Shelley commends. Amendment is so difficult that a powerful minority can obstruct for a long period the evident will of the people. The American no more than the Englishman believes in the inevitability of change nor goes forth gladly to greet it. He resists it to the death, and the Constitution which Shelley so mistakenly commended for its flexibility affords the shelter in which he immures himself.

[The United States is happier than European states, Shelley believes, because it has no king, no aristocracy, and no Court of Chancery, and no great standing army, which is the instrument of despotism. The French Revolution had less happy consequences than that in America for the reason that the populace, having been worse degraded by their oppressors, sought revenge. It is inevitable that the worst tyrannies should provoke the worst and bloodiest revolts. "The Revolution in France overthrew the hierarchy, the aristocracy and the monarchy, and the whole of that peculiarly insolent and oppressive system on which they were based. But as it only partially extinguished those passions which are the spirit of these forms a reaction took place which has restored in a certain limited degree the old system." Nevertheless good came from the Revolution. "France is, as it were, regenerated." Nor will it ever be possible wholly to restore the iniquities of the old regime. The prospect of the world is not, then, wholly dark. In Germany and in Spain the ferment of liberty is active. In Spain the weight of despotism, being linked of political and religious oppression, is heaviest: "The consequences of military despotism and the black, stagnant, venomous hatred which priests in common with eunuchs seek every opportunity to wreak upon the portion of mankind exempt from their own unmanly disqualifications is slavery." But the tortures to which the Spaniards are subjected "are the rapidly passing shadows, which forerun successful insurrection."

1 In South America Shelley looks to a group of free states. In India he perceives liberating forces at work. "The Turkish Empire is in its

last stage of ruin." In Egypt and in the West Indies there is evidence of a freer spirit than in the past. England meanwhile is "at a crisis in its destiny. The literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever followed or preceded a great and free development of the national will, has arisen, as it were, from a new birth. . . . It is felt by the British that this is in intellectual achievements a memorable age, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared in our nation since its last struggle for liberty. For the most unfailing herald, or companion, or follower, of an universal employment of the sentiments of a nation to the production of a beneficial change is poetry, meaning by poetry an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature." Whereupon occurs in Shelley's enlargement upon the idea the famous passage which he later employed to conclude his essay on the *Defence of Poetry*, the passage which closes with the words: "Poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.")

(The second chapter is entitled "On the Sentiment of the Necessity of Change." That change is necessary and desirable Shelley believes to be an almost universal sentiment. Those who oppose change do so only in the fear of violence, for even they are forced to admit the existence of great abuses. "But as those who argue thus derive for the most part great advantage and convenience from the continuance of these abuses, their estimation of the mischiefs of popular violence as compared with the mischiefs of tyrannical and fraudulent forms of government are likely, from the known principles of human nature, to be exaggerated." These might, if they would, lead the reform movement and thus remove all danger of the "temporary dominion of the poor," but they refuse the opportunity. "These persons propose to us the dilemma of submitting to a despotism which is notoriously gathering like an avalanche year by year, or taking the risk of something which it must be confessed bears the aspect of revolution." The words might be written today. Conditions in England in 1819 were not unlike those in the United States in 1935. But Shelley analyzes them with a perspicuity as rare now as in his time. Those with the power to direct inevitable change seek to retard it. History repeats itself most conspicuously in that nations and classes learn nothing from the repetitions of history.)

Shelley sketches rapidly the history of England from the time of the Long Parliament. The revolution of 1688 firmly established the aristocracy as the dominant power, with "the Crown the mask and

pretence of their own authority. At this period began that despotism of the oligarchy of party, which under color of administering the executive power lodged in the king, represented in truth the interest of the rich.... The power which has increased therefore is the power of the rich.... Monarchy is only the string which ties the robbers' bundle." The device whereby the rich maintained and increased their power was largely that of the national debt and the growth of a paper currency and instruments of credit. By means of these "they render wages fluctuating and add to the toil of the cultivator and manufacturer." Food prices have risen to the profit of speculators. The factory worker toils sixteen hours whereas he once worked eight. Children are turned "into lifeless and bloodless machines at an age when otherwise they would be at play before the cottage doors of their parents." A new aristocracy of wealth has arisen to supplement the old, a class that enjoys the "produce of the labor of others, without dedicating to the common service any labour in return.... Mankind seem to acquiesce, as in a necessary condition of the imbecility of their own will and reason, in the existence of an aristocracy."

'Something may perhaps be said in justification of the landed aristocracy, but for the "excise men and directors and government pensioners, usurers, stock jobbers, country bankers" nothing at all. "These are a set of pelting wretches in whose employment there is nothing to exercise even to their distortion the more majestic faculties of the soul. Though at the bottom it is all trick, there is something frank and magnificent in the chivalrous disdain of infamy connected with a gentleman.... But in the habits and lives of this new aristocracy created out of an increase in public calamities, and whose existence must be determined by their termination, there is nothing to qualify our disapprobation. They eat and drink and sleep, and in the intervals of these things performed with the most vexatious ceremony and accompaniments they cringe and lie. They poison the literature of the age in which they live by requiring either the anti-type of their own mediocrity in books, or such stupid and distorted and inharmonious idealisms as alone have the power to stir their torpid imaginations. Their hopes and fears are of the narrowest description. Their domestic affections are feeble, and they have no others. They think of any commerce with their species but as a means, never as an end, and as a means to the basest forms of personal advantage.'

Shelley's thesis is that the laboring classes have now to work doubly hard to support two aristocracies whereas, before the rise of the

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rentier class, there was but one. Or if they do not work twice as many hours they receive in real wages but half of what they once received for the same work. "The aged and the sickly are compelled either to work or starve. Children who were exempted from labour are put in requisition, and the vigorous promise of the coming generation blighted by premature exertion. For fourteen hours' labour, which they do perforce, they receive—no matter in what nominal amount—the price of seven. They eat less bread, wear worse clothes, are more ignorant, immoral, miserable and desperate. This then is the condition of the lowest and largest class, from whose labour the whole materials of life are wrought, of which the others are only the receivers or the consumers. They are more superstitious, for misery on earth begets a diseased expectation and panic-stricken faith in miseries beyond the grave." In all classes of society "excepting those within the privileged pale" the condition is "singularly unprosperous." And even the privileged suffer in all but material satisfactions. They suffer "in the loss of dignity, simplicity and energy, and in the possession of all those qualities which distinguish a slave-driver from a proprietor."<sup>4</sup>

What are the conclusions to the arguments thus outlined? Shelley summarizes them concisely:

—"That the majority of the people of England are destitute and miserable, ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-educated.

—"That they know this, and that they are impatient to procure a reform of the cause of this abject and wretched state.

—"That the cause of this peculiar misery is the unequal distribution which, under the form of the national debt, has been surreptitiously made of the products of their labour and the products of the labour of their ancestors; for all property is the produce of labour.

—"That the cause of that cause is a defect in the government."

And he concludes his summary with the statement that if the exploited mistakenly believe their condition unavoidable it is the duty of "every enlightened and honourable person" to inform them of the true facts and excite them "to the temperate but irresistible vindication of their rights."

[ In two or three pages Shelley vigorously denounces Malthus, not so much for the theory which he advances, "though it may be shown to be defective," but for the proposed remedy to the evils of overpopulation. The poor are to be denied what is the right of the rich. "The rich are to be permitted to add as many mouths to consume the products of the labours of the poor as they please." This, Shelley

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contends, is a denial of fundamental human equality. He does not attempt to argue the defects to which he alludes, and indeed, from a passage in his letters it is clear that he was impressed by the Malthusian argument. But he saw also, which was contrary to Malthus' own design, that the rich seized upon the theory as a justification for opposing all social reforms. Its meaning could so be twisted that the privileged classes found in it a salve for uneasy consciences. As a cloak for a policy of inaction and of opposition to all measures of social amelioration, the rich found it useful for a hundred years, nor is it even yet without uses to that end.

The specific reforms which Shelley desired—"before we aspire after theoretical perfection in the amelioration of our political state"—were these: abolish the national debt, disband the standing army, abolish sinecures, abolish tithes, make all religions equal before the law, and "make justice cheap, certain and speedy," this partly by "the institution of juries to every possible occasion of jurisprudence." He considers what the vast sums spent in "two liberticide wars" might have done to improve the lot of the common man: "It might have made every peasant's cottage, surrounded with its garden, a little paradise of comfort, with every convenience desirable in civilized life.... But the labor which is expressed by these sums has been diverted from these purposes of human happiness to the promotion of slavery." Is the debt to remain forever unpaid? He proposes, in effect, a capital levy upon the rich "who alone could, and justly... ought to pay." To do this would be to end "the juggling and complicated system of paper finance." An intolerable tax burden would thus be lifted from the shoulders of the poor. Shelley thereupon proceeds to discuss what is property justly held and what unjustly. Labor, skill, all personal exertions and their awards, whether of day laborer, artist, or professional man, constitute just capital. Nor does he oppose the inheritance of property earned by such capital though he holds that the "absolute right becomes weakened by descent." Unjust property "has its foundation in usurpation, or imposture, or violence, without which, by the nature of things, immense possessions of gold or land could never have been accumulated. Of this nature is the principal part of the property enjoyed by the aristocracy and by the great fundholders, the majority of whose ancestors never either deserved it by their skill and talents or acquired and created it by their personal labour."

The property thus acquired becomes by inheritance a permanent burden upon the taxpayers, one which, in the form of the national

debt has become too heavy to be borne longer. Consider what would happen were it doubled as it might be were the nation to undergo another war. "Could the nation bear £90,000,000 of yearly interest? must there be twice as many luxurious and idle persons? must the labourer receive for twenty-eight hours' work what he now receives for fourteen, what he once received for seven?" Reform or revolution is necessary. The establishment by violence of a republic based on universal suffrage would defeat its object, for "through the violence and sudden change which must attend it" it would "incur a great risk of being as rapid in its decline as in its growth." Better, then, through the exercise of patience and reason, to secure "a calm yet irresistible progress. A civil war, which might be engendered by the passions attending on this mode of reform, would confirm in the mass of the nation those military habits which have been already introduced by our tyrants, and with which liberty is incompatible. From the moment that a man is a soldier, he becomes a slave. He is taught obedience; his will is no longer, which is the most sacred prerogative of men, guided by his own judgment. He is taught to despise human life and suffering; this is the universal distinction of slaves. He is more degraded than a murderer; he is like the bloody knife which has stabbed and feels not: a murderer we may abhor and despise; a soldier, is by profession, beyond abhorrence and below contempt."

In the third and concluding chapter of his unfinished manuscript Shelley considers the probable means whereby reform may be brought about. How can the House of Commons be made, without revolution, to reform itself? "What motives would incite it to institute a reform which the aspect of the times renders indeed sufficiently perilous, but without which there will speedily be no longer anything in England to distinguish it from the basest and most abject community of slaves that ever existed." He considers the question of equality, the basis of popular government. "The first principle of political reform is the natural equality of men, not with relation to their property but to their rights. That equality in possessions which Jesus Christ so passionately taught is a moral rather than a political truth and is such as social institutions cannot without mischief inflexibly secure. Morals and politics can only be considered as portions of the same science, with relation to a system of such absolute perfection as Plato and Rousseau and other reasoners have asserted, and as Godwin has with irresistible eloquence systematized and developed. Equality in possessions must be the last result of the utmost

refinements of civilization; it is one of the conditions of that system of society towards which with whatever hope of ultimate success, it is our duty to tend. We may and ought to advert to it as to the elementary principle, as to the goal, unattainable perhaps, by us but which, as it were, we revive in our posterity to pursue."<sup>1</sup>

✓The immediate concern of reform is less ambitious. What is needed is a House of Commons, "nominated by the great mass of the people." The House of Lords and the Crown sufficiently represent the privileged classes. But the representatives of the people in the House of Commons should not at first be chosen by universal suffrage, for the result then would be "an immature attempt at a Republic. It is better that an object so inexpressibly great and sacred should never have been attempted than that it should be attempted and fail. It is no prejudice to the ultimate establishment of the boldest political innovations that we temporize so that when they shall be accomplished they may be rendered permanent." Curiously enough, Shelley, feminist that he was, did not think the time ripe for female suffrage, but, "should my opinion be the result of despondency, the writer of these pages would be the last to withhold his vote from any system which might tend to an equal and full development of the capacities of all living beings." He does not believe in the ballot, objecting to it as impersonal and mechanical. "The elector and the elected ought to meet one another face to face, and interchange the meanings of actual presence and share some common impulses, and, in a degree, understand each other. . . . It is in this publicity of the exercise of sovereignty that the difference between the republics of Greece and the monarchies of Asia consisted."

\ If the government forces the nation to take reform into its own hands both aristocracy and monarchy are likely to be abolished. Gradual reforms, once possible, are in the present temper of the people, unlikely. But if the reform is begun by the existing government "let us be contented with a limited *beginning*, with any whatsoever opening." The disfranchisement of the rotten boroughs is the first necessary step. After that further reforms may be slowly introduced as the people "become habituated to exercising the functions of sovereignty." The suffrage at first should demand as a qualification "the possession of a certain small property." Triennial parliaments should be instituted. These changes would not result in perfect social institutions, "But nothing is more idle than to reject a limited benefit because we cannot without great sacrifices obtain an unlimited one." Beyond the limited accomplishment lies the remote goal, faith in

which is the inspiration to the slow degrees of its approach. "It is in politics rather than in religion that faith is meritorious."

Should Parliament refuse to initiate reforms Shelley advocates universal suffrage and equal representation. How is this to be accomplished? The government directs spies, police, and a standing army. "They would disperse any assembly really chosen by the people, they would shoot and hew down any multitude, without regard to sex or age, as the Jews did the Canaanites, which might be collected in its defence, they would calumniate, imprison, starve, ruin and expatriate every person who wrote or acted or thought or might be suspected to think against them; misery and extermination would fill the country from one end to another." If public opinion is sufficiently strong, enlightened, and united, if it represents a majority the government will nevertheless surrender without violence. But if a people has been "grossly oppressed" and "their enthusiasm . . . subdued by the killing weight of toil and suffering" they afford a feeble opposition to which the government will not surrender. The true patriot then endeavors to enlighten the masses. He will encourage open public meetings for the dissemination of political truth. If these assemblies should be attacked by the troops as in the Manchester massacre of 1819 "exhort them peaceably to defy the danger, and to expect without resistance the onset of the cavalry, and wait with folded arms the event of the fire of the artillery and receive with unshrinking bosoms the bayonets of the charging battalions. Men are every day persuaded to incur greater perils for a less manifest advantage."

Passive resistance, Shelley believed, would break the morale of those in authority and of the troops which they command. The greater danger to the cause of liberty is the apathy to which the masses have been reduced. "They are sinking into a resemblance with the Hindoos and the Chinese, who were once men as they are. . . . It was principally the *effect of* a similar quietism that the populous and extensive nations of Asia have fallen into their existing decrepitude; and that anarchy, insecurity, ignorance and barbarism, the symptoms of the confirmed disease of monarchy, have reduced nations of the most delicate physical and intellectual organization and under the most fortunate climates of the globe to a blank in the history of man." Greater danger of anarchy lies in delay than in confronting the situation as it now exists. Continuance of oppression will but make the resultant explosion greater. Agitation for reform must be persistent. The government should be provoked to prosecutions for political libel. Tax impositions should be resisted in the courts.



"Confound the subtlety of lawyers with the subtlety of the law." Petitions should be got up and presented. "The poets, philosophers, and artists ought to remonstrate.... Suppose the memorials to be severally written by Godwin, Hazlitt and Bentham and Hunt, they would be worthy of the age and of the cause."

¶ If such pressure by public opinion should produce even small concessions let the people be exhorted "to pause until by the exercise of those rights which they have regained they become fitted to demand more. It is better that we gain what we demand by a process of negotiation which should occupy twenty years than that by communicating a sudden shock to the interests of those who are the depositaries and dependents of power we should incur the calamity which their revenge might inflict upon us by giving the signal of civil war." The people by constitutional guarantee possess the right of resistance. "The last resort of resistance is undoubtedly insurrection." But what are the consequences of war? "This is the alternative which the unprincipled cunning of the tyrants has presented to us, and which we must not shun. There is secret sympathy between Destruction and Power, between Monarchy and War; and the long experience of all the history of all recorded time teaches us with what success they have played into each other's hands. War is a kind of superstition; the pageantry of arms and badges corrupts the imagination of men. How far more appropriate would be the symbols of an inconsolable grief—muffled drums, and melancholy music, and arms reversed, and the livery of sorrow rather than of blood. When men mourn at funerals for what do they mourn in comparison with the calamities which they hasten with every circumstance of festivity to suffer and to inflict! Visit in imagination the scene of a field of battle or a city taken by assault, collect into one group the groans and the distortions of the innumerable dying, the inconsolable grief and horror of their surviving friends, the hellish exultation and unnatural drunkenness of destruction of the conquerors, the burning of the harvests and the obliteration of the traces of cultivation—to this, in a civil war, is to be added the sudden disruption of the bonds of social life, and 'father against son.'" And he adds, "if there had never been war, there could never have been tyranny in the world; tyrants take advantage of the mechanical organization of armies to establish and defend their encroachments."

¶ With this eloquent denunciation of war and with a final admonition that the people having once attained the victory over the tyranny which oppressed them renounce all thought of retribution upon their

former foes, the manuscript comes to an end. I have been at such length in summarizing and quoting from it both because it is so little known to the world and because it reveals so much of Shelley's character and of his philosophy. No other work of his in prose, not even the *Defence of Poetry*, is so important to an understanding of him. His essential moderation and temperance, his sane distrust of violence and revolution, are the qualities most superficially evident and to the casual reader of Shelley, acquainted only with his early radicalism, the most unexpected, though indeed Shelley's youthful enthusiasm is, as has been shown, usually misunderstood. Even in his crusade to convert the Irish he advocated moderation, tolerance, and the attainment of reforms through the quiet pressure of public opinion. Though he conceded that the French Revolution had done vastly more good than harm, its beneficial effects were limited insofar as its unnecessary violence had provoked a counter-revolution and confirmed the diehard conservatives in their opposition to all change whatsoever. Only as all other means fail does he concede the necessity of violence in revolution and that a violence provoked by the tactics of passive resistance. Nothing is more explicit than his renunciation of war. No modern pacifist could ask of him in this a more uncompromising attitude.\

Shelley's disbelief in the benefits deriving from violent change springs both from his knowledge of history and from his basic philosophy, which is evolutionary. His knowledge of scientific philosophy was sufficient for him to understand the theories of Diderot, Helvetius, Laplace, and Erasmus Darwin which explained both cosmic and biological processes in evolutionary terms. The history of the universe, of man, and of the life forms ancestral to man was, to these early evolutionary theorists as to us today, the history of the slow modification of suns and of living creatures by the pressure of their environment measurable in law or of an innate purposive will which slowly shaped the conditions of its life to accord with its desires. That his human evolutionary theory was vitalistic does not alter the fact that the evolutionary process is slow and proceeds by infinitely little steps. To one with this belief social and political change to be permanent must be effected by no fewer than a large minority of men sure of their end and competent to lead the majority along the path to it. This scientific philosophy links with the Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy in its evolutionary premise, for Platonist and neo-Platonist likewise postulate a world of change, one which slowly alters in conformity to the ideal forms in the divine mind.\

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[Of this divine mind the poetic and prophetic mind of man is the interpreter. Hence in Shelley's philosophy the importance of poets and philosophers who are, as he declares, the unacknowledged legislators of the world. It is they who anticipate change and by their anticipation stimulate the process in less perceptive men. They announce the next step in social development and define the goal to which the mass of men then aspire. Metaphysics Shelley declares to be fundamental, not remote from the practicalities of life but vitally related thereto. Before the social philosophers of the eighteenth century there were greater thinkers from whom these derive, Bacon, Berkeley, Hume. An age of change and vitality of thought derives from these and from the poets who give emotional expression to liberated thought. Philosopher and poet thus complement each other. Thought and emotion expressive of the deeper reality back of the actual world find in them its expression. They are truly prophets. Shelley conceives the ultimate goal which they set human society to be a world in which all men are equal, all are free, and yet all are inspired by a common desire. Metaphysically this social ideal is expressive of the many and the one, of multiplicity in unity. Socially this would seem to mean a reconciliation of the ideals of Communism and Anarchism, which, though seeming opposites, are reconcilable to a perfected humanity. Yet humanity thus perfected, Shelley declares both in prose and verse, can come to be only after an infinitely long and slow process of change. The necessity of an ideal expressed by philosopher and poet is that it defines the goal towards which human society must work]

[The way to that goal, to the attainment of that ideal, is only through the freeing of the will. Shelley comes repeatedly back to that cardinal principle. So long as men are enslaved, as they are through their own volition, they cannot move towards any goal. Freedom lies potentially within themselves. Socially they must perceive that they can make of human society whatever they wish, but the power to wish lies in their individual wills. Passive volition accomplishes nothing. The good life is the active life. The goal perceived must be striven for through the awakening in each of a sense of responsibility. As Prometheus throws off the enslavements of the past so must each individual soul find its freedom, must renounce its heritage of custom, bigotry, and hatred. The ideal society, the ultimate Utopia, is a society of free men each of whom has won freedom by his own efforts. In some such conception Shelley reconciles his instinctive individualism with his mystical intuition of the ultimate unity of the universe. To a mind

such as his it did not suffice to *feel* the solution of this seeming antithesis of multiplicity and unity, of the many and the one. He had also to find a solution in intellectual terms. Hence the importance in the history of his mental evolution of metaphysics. It must supply the answer both to his intellectual difficulties and to the problem of society. This reconciliation in him of intellect and intuition, of thought and emotion, is apparent in the work of his last four years, alike in *Prometheus Unbound* and in *A Philosophical View of Reform*.

## CHAPTER XV

### *Maturing Philosophy*



SHELLEY'S son, Percy Florence, was born November 12, 1819. Shelley writes Hunt the next day, "You may imagine that this is a great relief and a great comfort to me amongst all my misfortunes, past, present, and to come." He announces, too, the probability of his visiting England in the spring. A letter to John Gisborne, of November 16, contains some interesting comments on the Greeks and speculates as to the fate of the world had the Greek civilization remained dominant and Rome "all that its intellectual condition entitled it to be, a tributary, not the conqueror of Greece." Would the Christian religion then have arisen, "or the barbarians have overwhelmed the wrecks of civilisation which had survived the conquest and tyranny of the Romans? What then should we have been? As it is, all of us who are worth anything, spend our manhood in unlearning the follies, or expiating the mistakes, of our youth. We are stuffed full of prejudices; and our natural passions are so managed, that if we restrain them we grow intolerant and precise, because we restrain them not according to reason but according to error; and if we do not restrain them we do all sorts of mischief to ourselves and others. Our imagination and understanding are alike subjected to rules the most absurd." To what particular episodes of his own moral history he alludes one can only guess, but his philosophizing reveals, if no more, his common-sense realization of the insufficiency of good intentions and the instincts of the natural man as guides to conduct in a world of intolerance and rigid conventions. Shelley's life was one long awakening to the fact that the world in general was governed by motives and beliefs other than his own. He learned. By the time of his death his disillusionment was complete.

A letter to Maria Gisborne, of the same date, remarks on his reading Calderon and his admiration for the Spanish poet. "The incest scene of Amnon and Tamar is perfectly tremendous. . . . Incest is, like many other incorrect things, a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or hate. It may be the defiance of everything for the sake of another, which clothes itself in the glory of the highest heroism; or it may be that cynical rage which, confounding the good and the bad in existing opinions, breaks through them for the purpose

of rioting in selfishness and antipathy." A letter to Henry Reveley, November 17, has to do with his steamboat then building. The range of interests revealed in this diverse correspondence is characteristic and, too, Shelley's practice of linking the earthly circumstance to themes of greater import. He writes anent the casting of the cylinder of which Reveley had written at length: "One might imagine God, when he made the earth, and saw the granite mountains and flinty promontories flow into their craggy forms, and the splendour of their fusion filling millions of miles of the void space, like the tail of a comet, so looking, so delighting in his work. God sees his machine spinning around the sun, and delights in its success, and has taken out patents to supply all the suns in space with the same manufacture. Your boat will be to the ocean of water, what the earth is to the ocean of ether—a prosperous and swift voyager."

Occasional letters to Hunt contain literary and political allusions. It is unnecessary to quote more than a few of them and these only to reinforce ideas already expressed in earlier letters or in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. The consistency of his beliefs is the chief subject to remark and this only to dispel the illusion, wherever it may yet prevail, that Shelley in his political beliefs was subject to sudden vagaries. Thus in a letter to Hunt in November he writes: "I fear that in England things will be carried violently by the rulers, and they will not have learned to yield in time to the spirit of the age. The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance. You know my principles incite me to take all the good I can get in politics, for ever aspiring to something more. I am one of those whom nothing will fully satisfy, but who are ready to be partially satisfied in all that is practicable." At a later time Shelley would have been a Fabian Socialist. In a letter of December 23, he reproaches Hunt for not writing an article on the state of England and publishing it in the *Examiner* so that Shelley might be informed. Hunt's articles on religion he commends: "Added days and years and hours add to my disapprobation of this odious superstition, and to my gratitude to anyone who like you break for ever its ever-gathering bubble."

The letters from Italy to various correspondents reveal at times the expectation of returning to England, if only for a visit. But the doctors forbade. Shelley suffered from a pain in the side whose diagnosis is uncertain. Italy on the whole agreed with him though he suffered from the brief periods of cold. It is to Medwin that he adds to his

famous brief characterization of Italy in *Julian and Maddalo*, calling it "the Paradise of exiles, the retreat of Pariahs." In January of 1820 he, together with Mary and Clare Clairmont, removed from Florence to Pisa whence he writes the Gisbornes, "Mary and I are going to study mathematics," a remark of interest in Shelley's intellectual history. It is not on record that he got far with the subject but his intention shows an attitude wholly different from that of his youth in which he dismissed mathematics as of no importance. It is a reasonable surmise that he had perceived, in his readings of science, that mathematics was necessary to an understanding of the more advanced speculations in astronomy, physics, and in the newer subjects of chemistry and electricity. That his readings in science continued to the end of his life we have Trelawny's testimony.

There is numerous mention of both *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound* in the letters. One passage in a letter to the Olliers, the publishers, March 6, 1820, will serve for many: "'Prometheus Unbound,' I must tell you, is my favourite poem; I charge you, therefore, specially to pet him and feed him with fine ink and good paper. 'Cenci' is written for the multitude, and ought to sell well. I think, if I may judge by its merits, the 'Prometheus' cannot sell beyond twenty copies." That he should have thought *The Cenci* a poem to be appreciated by the multitude is no less surprising than the accuracy with which he prophesied the failure of *Prometheus* as a popular poem. A kindly review in *Blackwoods* of *The Revolt of Islam* seemingly had aroused hopes that something of what he wrote might find an audience. His opinion of his own works was always excessively modest despite an inner conviction that *Prometheus* and, subsequently, *Adonais* had merit. In writing Medwin suggesting some alterations in the latter's verses he does so with great diffidence. He offers his opinion that the employment of Indian words "in the body of the piece, and the relegation of their meaning to the notes" is a dubious practice. "Strictly, I imagine, every expression in a poem ought to be in itself an intelligible picture. But this practice, though foreign to that of the great poets of former times, is so highly admired by our contemporaries that I can hardly counsel you to dissent. And then you have Moore and Lord Byron on your side, who, being much better and more successful poets than I am, may be supposed to know better the road to success than one who has sought and missed it."

He continues, "I am printing some things which I am vain enough to wish you to see. Not that they will sell. . . . A man like me can in fact only be a poet by dint of stinting himself of meat and drink to

pay his printer's bill—that is, he can only print poems on this condition.” It is a passage to give any lover of literature pause. Had Shelley not had a modest income most of his work would not have seen the light in his day, if, indeed, ever. It is idle to speculate as to the number of mute inglorious Shelleys the world may have produced who were not so fortunate as to possess adequate incomes. So, too, others gifted in the arts and sciences whom the accidents of birth denied expression of their talents. The notion that genius will surely find a way is the fondest of delusions. In Shelley's case, even with sufficient means to live frugally in Italy and to print his poems, only the greatest tenacity of purpose in the face of ill-health, savage criticism, and a complete lack of popular encouragement led him to produce works which posterity, and that unintelligently and superficially, has appreciated. He should be held up as a caution to the young.

To Leigh Hunt, Shelley, writing on May 1, 1820, returns thanks for kind remarks passed on *Prometheus*: “That you and that a few chosen judges should approve of it... outweighs the censure of ‘a whole theatre of others’.” Ollier, the bookseller, seems not to have been so flattering: “I am afraid that I to a certain degree am in his power; there being no other bookseller upon whom I can depend for publishing any of my works; though if by any chance they should become popular, he would be as tame as a lamb. And in fact they are all rogues. It is less the character of the individual than the situation in which he is placed which determines him to be honest or dishonest; perhaps we ought to regard an honest bookseller, or an honest seller of anything else in the present state of human affairs as a kind of Jesus Christ. The system of society as it exists at present must be overthrown from the foundations with all its superstructure of maxims and of forms before we shall find anything but disappointment in our intercourse with any but a few select spirits. This remedy does not seem to be one of the easiest. But the generous few are not the less held to tend with all their efforts towards it. If faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion.”

To pursue day by day Shelley's correspondence with his friends, and to relate thereto and to the incidents of his life, as far as they can be known, his poetry and his prose, is to understand, as by a casual reading of his work it is impossible to do, the tragedy of his life; it is to enter a little into the agonies of a fine and sensitive nature who suffered more than most all the varied ills of human life. On one day he writes to Southey protesting against the review in the *Quarterly* and asking that Southey deny the authorship, which indeed was not



his. It was not to criticism of his work that Shelley objected but that the reviewer should "insult the domestic calamities of a writer of the adverse party . . . that he should make those calamities the theme of the foulest and the falsest slander . . . with the cowardice no less than the malignity, of an assassin." Four days later (June 30) he writes to the Gisbornes of "Godwin's implacable exactions; you know his boundless and plausible sophistry." And on July 2 he writes of the death of a little girl, "my Neapolitan charge," an orphan child whom he had seemingly, with his usual generosity, promised to care for. All who touched him, he came to think, were accursed: "It seems as if the destruction that is consuming me were as an atmosphere which wrapt and *infected* everything connected with me. The rascal Paolo has been taking advantage of my situation at Naples in December, 1818, to attempt to extort money by threatening to charge me with the most horrible crimes. He is connected with some English here, who hate me with a fervour that almost does credit to their phlegmatic brains, and listen to and vent the most prodigious falsehoods. 'An ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten this dunghill of a world'." The rascalities of Paolo were to have still further consequences.

Yet it is in the letter to the Gisbornes which recounts these unhappy events that Shelley encloses his charming poetic epistle *To Maria Gisborne*, a little masterpiece of easy colloquial verse. Written in Henry Reveley's workshop amid engines, tools, and oddments which Shelley enumerates whimsically, the poem nevertheless glances at graver matters which suggest the preoccupations of his thought. The "dread engines" of the workshop suggest thumbscrews and other engines of torture of the Inquisition when Spain, which "now relumes her fire on Freedom's hearth," sought to conquer England in the days of the Armada. The bowl of quicksilver is "that dew which the gnomes drink . . . pledging the demons of the earthquake" when the cities of man fall in ruin. And he remembers days when he picnicked with the Gisbornes in the clear Italian weather—

... and how we spun

A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun  
Of this familiar life which seems to be  
But is not—or is but quaint mockery  
Of all we would believe—and sadly blame  
The jarring and inexplicable frame  
Of this wrong world.

Mrs. Gisborne in London will see friends dear to him, among them Leigh Hunt.

You will see Hunt—one of those happy souls  
Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom  
This world would smell like what it is—a tomb.

He must, whatever the theme, "bring the eternal note of sadness in." All objects and all thoughts suggest man's cruelty to man, the loss or hope of liberty, and the final comforting assurance that earthly life is illusion and that a happier world lies beyond. Or is this assurance no more than fanciful, a protective half-conscious self-deception?

A letter to Medwin, July 20, 1820, expressive of pleasure at praise of *The Cenci* contains also a comment on *Prometheus* which, from this and other remarks, was evidently Shelley's favorite among his works: "'Prometheus Unbound,' is in the merest spirit of ideal Poetry, and not, as the name would indicate, a mere imitation of the Greek drama, or indeed if I have been successful, is it an imitation of anything." To Medwin's objection to the introduction in *The Cenci* of the name of God, Shelley replies, "*We* Catholics speak eternally and familiarly of the first person of the Trinity; and amongst *us* religion is more interwoven with, and is less extraneous to, the system of ordinary life." He announces his intention of writing a play "in the spirit of human nature, without prejudice or passion, entitled 'Charles the First.' So vanity intoxicates people; but let those few who praise my verses, and in whose approbation I take so much delight, answer for the sin." The fragment of the play that Shelley has left, if without prejudice or passion, is written nevertheless in the spirit of revolt against political tyranny. Shelley obviously chose a period whose political, if not its religious, temper was one sympathetic to his own.

Writing to Mary, July 23, Shelley makes some comments on the political situation at home and abroad which reveal the moderation and justice of his views: "Mr. T[ighe] is planning a journey to England to secure his property in the event of a revolution, which, he is persuaded, is on the eve of exploding. I neither believe that, nor do I fear that the consequences will be so immediately destructive to the existing forms of social order. Money will be delayed, and the exchange reduced very low, and my annuity and Mrs. M[ason]'s on account of these being *money*, will be in some danger; but land is quite safe. Besides, it will not be so rapid. Let us hope we shall have a reform, . . . There is bad news from Palermo; the soldiers resisted the

people, and a terrible slaughter, amounting, it is said, to four thousand men, ensued. The event, however, was as it should be. Sicily, like Naples, is free." The course of events in England, which he did not live to see, justified in its moderation his expectations. But the reforms instituted would have disappointed him, falling, as they did, so far short of his hopes in the reality of their accomplishment. Shelley's emphasis, despite his recognition of economic evils, is upon political institutions and their alteration./The subservience of political forms to economic realities was in his day very little perceived. The revolution of 1832 in England forced the ruling class to relinquish a part of its power to the rising capitalist and manufacturing classes. Whether it did more than substitute a new form of slavery for the old is debatable.<sup>1</sup>

On July 27 Shelley wrote his kindly invitation to Keats to come and spend the winter with him in Pisa. The relations of the two were scarcely intimate though they had met at Leigh Hunt's and Shelley's liking for Keats was seemingly greater than Keats's for him. Keats was three years younger, jealously independent of spirit, and perhaps a bit afraid of patronage. These all were barriers. A greater one, I suspect, was the realization which Keats must have had that Shelley, with his erudition, and his positive and forceful character, might, even more than Hunt, exert an influence on his poetic development. This Keats wished to keep his own, untainted by the style of another, however excellent. Shelley's knowledge of Keats's illness came through Mr. Gisborne and its seriousness, it is clear, he did not comprehend. It is a gracious letter and the praise of Keats's verse is such as Keats in a healthier condition of mind and body must have appreciated more than he did: "I have lately read your 'Endymion' again, and even with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things so you but will. I always tell Ollier to send you copies of my books. 'Prometheus Unbound' I imagine you will receive nearly at the same time with this letter. 'The Cenci' I hope you have already received—it was studiously composed in a different style... In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism. I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan." Keats in his reply betrays a touchiness due to his ill-health: "I am in expectation of 'Prometheus' every day. Could I have my own wish effected, you would have it still in manuscript, or be now putting an end to the

second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first blights on Hampstead Heath. I am returning advice upon your hands." It is in this letter also, that, remarking on *The Cenci*, Keats passes a judgment surprisingly unperceptive for one usually so acute in all matters of criticism, "you might... be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore."

Whoever has pursued the history of Shelley's relations with Godwin and viewed with wonder his patience in enduring the exactions and rapacities of that philosopher, whose merits he overrated, comes to the letter of August 7 with relief and joy. At last Shelley is to speak his mind. The debt which he had repaid so many times is at last to be cancelled. It is a letter which reveals the strength and firmness which lay beneath Shelley's deceptive appearance and tremulous sensibility. It should be read in its entirety. But it is long and I shall cite only briefly from it: "I have given you within a few years the amount of a considerable fortune, and have destituted myself for the purpose of realising it of nearly four times the amount. Except for the *goodwill* which this transaction seems to have produced between you and me, this money, for any advantage it ever conferred on you might as well have been thrown into the seas. Had I kept in my own hands this £4,000 or £5,000 and administered it in trust for your permanent advantage, I should have been indeed your benefactor. The error, however, was greater in the man of mature age, extensive experience, and penetrating intellect than in the crude and impetuous boy. Such an error is seldom committed twice." There follows a long review of their financial relations and a merciless revelation of Godwin's incompetence and utter selfishness. The letter concludes with the promise that Mary shall no longer be plagued by Godwin's importunities. Mary had herself asked on a previous occasion that Shelley intervene: "The correspondence, therefore, rests between you and me, if you should consider any further discussion of a similar nature with that in which you have lately been engaged with Mary necessary after the full explanation which I have given of my views, and the unalterable decision which I have pronounced. Nor must the correspondence with your daughter on a similar subject be renewed. . . . She has not, nor ought she to have, the disposal of money; if she had, poor thing, she would give it all to you." Godwin characterized the letter as "scurrilous."

In a vein similarly drastic Shelley replied on August 17 to Southey who had disavowed the review of *The Revolt of Islam* of which Shelley had suspected him. Southey, while denying the review, took it

upon himself to condemn Shelley's productions "as monstrous in their kind, and pernicious in their tendency" and to recommend that Shelley adopt Christianity as a cure for his immorality. To this Shelley replied: "I confess your recommendation to adopt the system of ideas you call Christianity has little weight with me, whether you mean the popular superstition in all its articles, or some other more refined theory with respect to those events and opinions which put an end to the graceful religion of the Greeks. To judge of the doctrines by their effects, one would think that this religion were called the religion of Christ and Charity *ut lucus a non lucendo*, when I consider the manner in which they seem to have transformed the disposition and understanding of you and men of the most amiable manners and the highest accomplishments, so that even when recommending Christianity you cannot forbear breathing out defiance, against the express words of Christ. . . . Instead . . . of refraining from 'judging that you be not judged' you not only judge but condemn. . . . But you are such a pure one as Jesus Christ found not in all Judea to throw the first stone against the woman taken in adultery! . . . You select a single passage out of a life otherwise not only spotless, but spent in an impassioned pursuit of virtue, which looks like a blot, merely because I regulated my domestic arrangements without deferring to the notions of the vulgar, although I might have done so quite as conveniently had I descended to their base thoughts—this you call *guilt*. . . . I am innocent of ill, either done or intended; the consequences you allude to flowed in no respect from me. . . . I need not to be instructed that the opinion of the ruling party, to which you have attached yourself, always exacts, contumeliously receives, and never reciprocates toleration. . . . I cannot hope that you will be candid enough to feel, or, if you feel, to own that you have done ill in accusing, even in your mind, an innocent and a persecuted man, whose only real offence is the holding opinions something similar to those which you once held respecting the existing state of society." An excoriating reply to Southey's smugness and deserved.

Letters so severe are rare in Shelley. For September of 1820 there exists a fragment of a letter to Godwin in which, though the tone is firm and Shelley persists in his refusal to let Mary be agitated, he says also, "Allow me to express the hope that you will write to me from time to time a frank account of the state of your affairs, and that you will consider my will to assist as only limited by my power." Magnanimity could scarcely go farther. But it was a magnanimity which was frequently strained. He exercised himself in Clare's behalf

with Byron and Byron was not above writing confidentially to the Hoppners things that came oddly from an ostensible friend. The Gisbornes, whom he had so generously assisted with money for the projected steamboat, were planning to sell the materials bought with Shelley's money for its construction. Shelley writes to Clare Clairmont: "The Gisbornes are people totally without faith.—I think they are altogether the most filthy and odious animals with which I ever came in contact." This is reminiscent of his disillusionments of earlier years. Shelley remained to the last somewhat of an easy mark, the prey of the impecunious and the rapacious. That he grew in worldly caution is evident but not sufficiently wholly to avoid misadventure. To be suspicious of everyone was not in his nature and apparently his procedure was to have faith until disillusioned—on the whole an expensive method. Happily he was not always deceived, for there were a few instances in which his trust was not abused, among them, so far as evidence reveals, Clare Clairmont and Leigh Hunt, whose worldly reputations were none of the best. They, at least, badly as they managed their affairs, were capable of deep affection and did not reward his generosity with ingratitude and treachery.

A letter to the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, though never sent, reveals his admiration for Keats and his wish to be of service to him. Perhaps he did not send the letter because he realized the futility of intercession by one worse hated by the *Quarterly* than Keats himself. He endeavors in temperate and persuasive terms to obtain for Keats a just recognition. Admitting that some of the adverse criticism of *Endymion* is deserved, he continues: "Surely the poem, with all its faults, is a very remarkable production for a man of Keats's age, and the promise of ultimate excellence is such as has rarely been afforded even by such as has afterwards attained high literary eminence." Shelley was wholly misinformed as to the effects of the hostile review upon Keats, stating that it has greatly contributed to "embittering his existence and inducing a disease from which there are now but faint hopes of his recovery. The first effects are described to me to have resembled insanity." That Shelley should have believed these reports from England shows how superficial was his knowledge of Keats. The unfinished letter concludes with the request that the editor read Keats's second volume and in it, especially, *Hyperion*. "The great proportion of this piece is surely in the very highest style of poetry. I speak impartially, for the canons of taste to which Keats has conformed in his other compositions are the very reverse of my own."

To Peacock he writes, November 8, of *Hyperion* in a similar vein:

"It is certainly an astonishing piece of writing, and gives me a conception of Keats which I confess I had not before." Yet he writes, oddly, of the volume which contains it that it is "in other respects insignificant enough." Could he have read, one wonders, *The Eve of St. Agnes* or *Lamia*? Posterity is always surprised at the literary judgments of the past. The indifference of most of the contemporaries of Keats and Shelley to their poetry and, more, the active dislike which it aroused, seem to a later century incredible. Among those best aware of contemporary excellence were Hunt, Hazlitt, Keats, and Shelley but none of these was to our standards infallible. Keats could find little to praise in *The Cenci*, nor Shelley seemingly much in Keats's last volume but *Hyperion*. The fact makes the hostility of the Reviews to both more intelligible. The hatred of the human race for new ideas, religious, political, and moral, is seemingly only surpassed by its repudiation of new forms of beauty. Was it not Gounod who said of César Franck's symphony something to the effect that it was the last word in musical inanity? Musicians and poets apparently suffer most, even among their kind, from this aversion to anything new.

Shelley was generously appreciative of other men's work—Wordsworth's, Hunt's, Keats's, Byron's, Coleridge's, Peacock's. He over-praises even, when writing of them, and it is only in chance and incidental comments that his deeper opinion is revealed. Two standards are implied: the superficial standard, so to speak, by which a man is weighed against his contemporaries; and an eternal standard by which a man is judged in comparison with the immortals. The reader senses in this duality of judgment the same disconcerting duality evident in Shelley's judgment of matters political, social, and moral—the core of hard caution and cool judgment, beneath a nature superficially emotional, mercurial, given to mistaken enthusiasms. He writes Peacock in the letter previously cited: "May you start into life some day and give us another 'Melincourt.' Your 'Melincourt' is exceedingly admired, and I think much more so than any of your other writings. In this respect the world judges rightly. There is more of the true spirit, and an object less indefinite, than in either 'Headlong Hall' or Scythrop." This is not the world's judgment but Shelley's, and the reason for his preferring *Melincourt* is that in it, more nearly than in any other of his works, Peacock commits himself to the liberal point of view, is less the detached laughing philosopher. Shelley's belief, elsewhere expressed, is that Peacock was essentially cold. In *Melincourt* Peacock was for once almost warm, and in his preference for this novel Shelley betrays his innermost conviction.

"I am," he writes Peacock, "infirm of purpose. I have great designs, and feeble hopes of ever accomplishing them. I read books, and, though I am ignorant enough, they seem to teach me nothing. To be sure, the reception the public have given me might [go] far enough to damp any man's enthusiasm. They teach you, it may be said, only what is true. Very true, I doubt not, and the more true the less agreeable. I can compare my experience in this respect to nothing but a series of wet blankets. I have been reading nothing but Greek and Spanish. Plato and Calderon have been my gods." The allusions to Calderon in his later letters are numerous. He says in a November letter to John Gisborne, "I am bathing myself in the light and odour of the flowery and starry 'Autos.' I have read them all more than once." Shelley's mature passion for only the best literature is a bit depressing to lighter minds but it is a fact to be accepted. The final judgment upon him will be passed by someone equally saturated with Calderon, Plato, Homer, and the rest. No one else can do him entire justice. Yet even critics less soundly read may point out the fact, too little recognized, that Shelley's poetical inspiration derives more from ideas, and these fed by the literature which he read, than from emotional experiences of a purely personal character. No doubt the best of his lyrical work combines the two, emotional experience intensifying the intellectual substance, as in *Prometheus* or the *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*. Even so the intellectual elements are chief. In such purely emotional lyrics as the *Indian Serenade* there are, of course, no intellectual elements. But lyrics of this sort, despite the admiration in which they are held, seem to me among Shelley's lesser work. It is when he gives lyrical expression to ideas that he reaches his poetic heights.

On January 20, 1821, Shelley sent to the Olliers *The Witch of Atlas*. The poem had been inspired in August of the previous year during a walking trip to a mountain top and was written in three days upon his return. It comes thus at the time when he had just completed *Prometheus* and both in its ideas and its imagery is similar to that poem, although written in a gay and whimsical mood. In its dedication to Mary he teases her for her sensitiveness to the Reviews which would prescribe for him the kind of poetry he should write. *The Witch* is written to please himself and he challenges her to understand it, a challenge which, it is evident, she could not meet, for her comments show no comprehension of its ideas or the imagery in which they are conveyed. She has written that "he loved to shelter himself ... in the airiest flights of fancy." The words convey a fatal half-



truth. Shelley does turn now and then from the too painful contemplation of the actual world to an imaginary world, though such a relief is only a momentary reaction from the unflinching realism to which he held himself. But "the airiest flights of fancy," even so, have their intellectual basis. A better word than fancy is imagination. In *The Witch* Shelley plays with the ideas which were the serious substance of *Prometheus*. The imagery, too, is similar to that employed in *Prometheus*, in both deriving from neo-Platonism and natural science.

I have in a small book, weighted with obscure citations from the neo-Platonic philosophers, set forth what I regard to be the meaning of the poem and have explained the symbolism which it employs. Light as the poem is it is psychologically of extreme interest in the intimations which it gives of the workings of a poet's imagination, of a poet at any rate such as Shelley whose intellectual world is unusually sharp, rounded, and complete and whose animating principle is intellectual rather than emotional. Such is not the general belief. *The Witch* merely demonstrates how little understanding a world which follows its emotional impulses without comprehending them has of the creative spirit of artist or poet who, the better he is, the clearer is his perception of his own thought and the end at which he aims. *The Witch* is a highly intellectual performance, the facility of whose production proves that the ideas which it employs had long incubated in the poet's mind. The ease with which it rationalizes Greek and Egyptian myth, the facility with which it uses the symbols of neo-Platonism, and the evident background of scientific speculation, all attest that in it Shelley displays the world in which his thought and imagination habitually moved. If this is not the case the poem is incredible, the product of mental processes wholly unknown. Such an explanation no reasonable person can accept, for it is an admission of supernaturalism. It would be better to have done with all critical analysis and declare that poetry is the inspiration of a genius, a familiar spirit, and the poet but an uncomprehending mouth-piece to such a deity. The processes of the creative imagination, sufficiently obscure as they are, need ask no such evasion in the attempt to justify them.

*The Witch* is not in itself an obscure poem though employing a symbolism whose origin must be known and referring to an intellectual background of an unusual character. The poem arose, I believe, out of the same speculation which produced *Prometheus*. The *Witch* may be thought of as Asia before her union with Prometheus,

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the mind of man. She is the spirit of love and beauty in nature, Venus, the earthly incarnation of the divine love. Venus in one of her aspects is, however, Isis the moon goddess, who in the Greek philosophy is Diana or Minerva according to the emphasis which is accorded her various attributes. The divinities of the Egyptian and Greek mythologies are three-fold, having heavenly and earthly attributes and other attributes intermediary thereto. The residences of these three forms of the one divinity are the sun, the moon, and the earth, or again the upper, middle, and lower heaven. Thus Minerva, the goddess of things intellectual, resides in the upper air and her earthly habitation is the peak of Atlas, the highest mountain known to the ancients. The Witch may from the title of the poem be guessed then to be Minerva, goddess of intellectual beauty.<sup>1</sup>

In his poetic delineation of the Witch, both in her birth and her activities, Shelley displays her in her triune functions, as Minerva, as Diana or Isis, and as the earthly Venus. These, be it understood, are but three aspects of the one universal principle of love, beauty, and intelligence, attributes of the One, the invisible God whose visible incarnation is Minerva. Shelley's emphasis is chiefly upon those attributes of the goddess which pertain to the moon and the physical activities of the upper air, though he does not ignore her in her rôle of Venus, who personifies earthly love and creation. The emphasis upon her intellectuality is in accord with his personification in other poems of the principle of intellectual beauty—in *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *Prometheus*, *The Sensitive Plant*, and, less obviously in *Epipsychidion*. This is so by reason of Shelley's own nature. The love and beauty which he sought was that divine love and beauty, which, it is taught in the Platonic philosophy, is the animating principle of the world and to a reunion with which the unsatisfied soul of man aspires.

The philosophy and the symbolism which Shelley reveals in *The Witch* are not wholly of his invention though he elaborates upon them for his own purposes. Neo-Platonism had both rationalized the old mythology, interpreting it in terms of the solar myth and the phenomena of the seasons, and adapted it as a symbolism to explain the conflict of good and evil in the world. Shelley but carries the process a step farther, bringing to bear, in his reading of the functions of Isis and Minerva, the findings of a science unknown to the ancients. Thus, in the ancient belief, Minerva was the goddess of healing, appearing to the sick in dreams and telling the nature of their afflictions. Shelley linked this ancient belief to the healing technic of animal magnetism as practiced by Mesmer, wherein, in the trance

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induced by the healer, the patient disclosed the character of his ailment. Shelley doubtless guessed that the priests of ancient times practiced some such form of magnetic healing as that rediscovered by Mesmer. He perceived, too, that the ancients in their meteorology had guessed at the important rôle played by the moon in all atmospheric phenomena. A later meteorology had shown these phenomena to be electric. It is electricity in water vapor, cloud, rainfall, and dew which animates the unceasing cycle of creation and decay. Therefore Shelley attributes to Isis and Minerva, personified in the Witch, control of the electric forces of the world.

There is a further unifying link in the activities of the goddess both in fertility and healing. Animal magnetism, Mesmer believed, was akin to the force which exerts the attraction between earth and moon and all the heavenly bodies. The healing magnetism appeared to him to ebb and flow like the tides. This mysterious force, magnetism, was perhaps the one ultimate force of the universe. Shelley had encountered this idea before in many places. The desire for a single actuating principle animates both philosophy and natural science. The Greeks had postulated a divine fire or ether. Natural scientists, Newton and others, had postulated an ether which might be no other than electricity or magnetism; or to put it another way, electricity and magnetism were kindred forces or functions of the mysterious ether, source of all things. Shelley, both in *Prometheus* and in *The Witch*, reconciles the old beliefs, the old rationalizations of myth, with the speculations of the more imaginative modern scientists. It is his effort to unify metaphysics and physics, to impose a monistic unity upon a seemingly pluralistic universe. The most profound expression of this attempt is *Prometheus Unbound*, but *The Witch of Atlas* has as its background the same philosophy, which a correct interpretation of its symbolism reveals. Therefore, the great importance of *The Witch* in any analysis of Shelley's thought. Gay as it is, playful and sportive, the world of its thought is philosophic. In the light of the study of Shelley's intellectual history it is not surprising that this is so. His entire history displays his desire to reconcile his beliefs, to bring them all under one head as parts of a unified and consistent philosophy.

It is fitting at this point to consider also *Epipsychidion*, product of the same year as *The Witch*, for it too contains ideas which derive from Shelley's Platonism. Emilia Viviani, subject of the poem, a beautiful Italian girl confined in a convent as virtual prisoner by a jealous step-mother, is mentioned in a letter to Clare Clairmont of January 2,

1821. Again on January 16 he writes to Clare: "I see Emily sometimes; and whether her presence is the source of pain or pleasure to me, I am equally ill-fated in both. I am deeply interested in her destiny, and that interest can in no manner influence it. She is not, however, insensible to my sympathy, and she counts it among her alleviations. As much comfort as she receives from my attachment to her, *I lose*. There is no reason that you should fear any mixture of that which you call *love*." To this explicit statement should be added one to Ollier of February 16: "The longer poem [*Epipsychidion*] I desire should not be considered as my own; indeed, in a certain sense, it is a production of a portion of me already dead. . . . It is to be published simply for the esoteric few; and I make its author a secret, to avoid the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison; transforming all they touch into corruption of their own natures." To Gisborne he wrote, "The *Epipsychidion* is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me." One more: "The person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno, and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace. If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

These explicit disavowals and a statement in the "Advertisement" of the poem that it "is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates; and to a certain other class it must ever remain incomprehensible from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas of which it treats"—all have not sufficed to exculpate Shelley from the charge of being in love with Emilia. He has partly himself to thank. Had he not named her in the poem and suggested to her taking ship with him to some deserted Ionian isle, the professions of Platonic affection would be more convincing. Their life together in this unworldly paradise is also depicted with some fulness. It is an imaginary elopement and amour but the line between the personal and the ideal is surely not drawn with any distinctness, and Mrs. Shelley's conspicuous silence upon attendant circumstances in her edition of the poem implies, if no more, an imperfect sympathy with its subject. It was not, after all, wholly flattering to be likened

to the moon whereas Emilia was likened to the sun, and the relationship thus allegorized has an undoubtedly bigamous air. Yet Shelley's spiritual infidelity, if such it was, and as it seems to have been, links up with aspects of his emotional nature and with his philosophy in ways that transcend, in their interest, any question of the immediate personal facts of the case. Consider the poem, as Shelley asked that it be considered, to be an idealized history of his life and feelings. As such it tells a great deal both as to his thought and his conduct.

The "poor captive bird" and "high, spirit-wingèd Heart" whom he addresses at the beginning of the poem can be no other than Emilia. But the "Seraph of Heaven" of the next stanza is something more, even if thought of as incarnate in the womanly form of Emilia. The "veiled glory of this lampless Universe" and the "Harmony of Nature's art" can refer to none less than the Uranian Venus or the Witch of the *Witch of Atlas* or Asia of *Prometheus*—all personifications of the spirit of love and beauty in nature. These are his "youth's vision" of love and beauty, personified now or symbolized in Emily. Her he loves as representative of this divine beauty and wishes that she had been his sister or Mary's. In the next stanza it is not certain whether he is addressing Emilia or whether the divine beauty which she recalls. The latter seems the more probable, because he goes on to say,

She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,  
And lured me towards sweet death; . . .

lines which suggest *Alastor*, which poem, if correctly interpreted, debates the danger to the nympholept of yielding to his hopeless rapture, for the pursuit of unattainable love and beauty unfits the pursuer for human life and leads to death. In the ensuing lines are images and phrases which recall those descriptive of Asia and of Thetis in *Prometheus*: "image of some bright eternity," "a shadow of some golden dream," "a Splendor"—these are all descriptive of the love and beauty of which he had a vision in youth which forever has haunted and perplexed him, and whose pursuit he has known to be fatal. How after the contemplation of this goddess shall he "descend, and perish not"?

Line 130 clearly has descended from the divine contemplation to Emilia:

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate  
Whose course has been so starless! Oh, too late  
Belovèd!

Either he should have known her in the "fields of immortality" or should have moved beside her on earth "a shadow of that substance." By this I take him to mean that he finds too late in Emilia his affinity, the complement of his soul, such as is described in Plato's *Banquet*. For, says Plato, the soul forever yearns for that other half of itself from which it has been divided. Yet it is not quite clear whether Emilia is this affinity or only the symbol thereof. I think the latter, for as the poem continues to expound his doctrine of earthly love he avows a philosophy of no narrowing monogamy such as would seem prescribed to the completed soul—but declares that on earth love must be expansive, must not confine itself to one friend or lover:

I never was attached to that great sect  
 Whose doctrine is, that each one should select  
 Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,  
 And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend  
 To cold oblivion, though 'tis in the code  
 Of modern morals, and the beaten road  
 Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread  
 Who travel to their home among the dead  
 By the broad highway of the world, and so  
 With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,  
 The dreariest and the longest journey go.

Love he conceives to be an expansive, not a narrowing, emotion. He compares it to understanding and to imagination, which feed and grow upon that which they contemplate:

... Narrow  
 The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,  
 The life that wears, the spirit that creates  
 One object, and one form, and builds thereby  
 A sepulchre for its eternity.

If pleasure and love and thought are divided "each part exceeds the whole." This is—

... the eternal law  
 By which those live, to whom this world of life  
 Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife  
 Tills for the promise of a later birth  
 The wilderness of this Elysian earth.

From early youth, in dream, in "visioned wanderings," he had been haunted by a "Being."

## The Quest of Ideal Beauty

... On an imagined shore,  
 Under the gray beak of some promontory  
 She met me, robed in such exceeding glory  
 That I beheld her not.

He heard her voice in solitudes, discovered her in every form of beauty, in "antique verse and high romance":

And in that best philosophy, whose taste  
 Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom  
 As glorious as a fiery martyrdom—  
 Her Spirit was the harmony of truth.

It was in pursuit of this vision of perfect love, beauty, and truth that he "sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire," leaving "the caverns of my dreamy youth"—a Platonic figure which implies that he left the subjective contemplation of this ideal for its realization in the actual world. There the vision failed him. She passed—

Into the dreary cone of our life's shade.

With this eclipse he would have pursued his ideal beyond the grave had not a voice said—

"The phantom is beside thee whom thou seekest."

But though he went forth—

Into the wintry forest of our life

he did not find what he sought.

... One whose voice was venom'd melody  
 Sate by a well, under blue night-shade bowers;  
 The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers;  
 Her touch was as electric poison,—flame  
 Out of her looks into my vitals came,  
 And from her living cheeks and bosom flew  
 A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew  
 Into the core of my green heart, and lay  
 Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown gray  
 O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime  
 With ruins of unseasonable time.

How literally this passage is to be taken I do not know, for there is nothing, so far as I am aware, to support its seeming implication. If he alludes to some youthful experiment in vice, the evil consequences would seem to have been spiritual rather than physical. The next stanza, which tells of the "many mortal forms" in which he

... rashly sought  
The shadow of that idol of my thought

suggests that the "one whose voice was venomed melody" is not to be identified with any earthly woman, but the inference is clearly unsure.

The mortal forms in whom he sought the incarnation of love and beauty are identifiable in Shelley's history with perhaps one doubtful instance. Does the one who was true, "Oh! why not true to me?" allude to Harriet Grove or to Harriet Westbrook? Harriet Westbrook is later likened to the "comet, beautiful and fierce," for which reason I should guess the one untrue to him to be his first love, Harriet Grove. The "cold chaste Moon" is unmistakably Mary Shelley.

... Young and fair  
As the descended Spirit of that sphere,  
She hid me, as the Moon may hide the night  
From its own darkness, until all was bright  
Between the Heaven and Earth of my calm mind,  
And, as a cloud charioted by the wind,  
She led me to a cave in that wild place,  
And sate beside me, with her downward face  
Illumining my slumbers, like the Moon  
Waxing and waning o'er Endymion.  
And I was laid asleep, spirit and limb,  
And all my being became bright or dim  
As the Moon's image in a summer sea,  
According as she smiled or frowned on me;  
And there I lay, within a chaste cold bed.  
Alas, I then was nor alive nor dead.

This is surely explicit and reinforces the implications of the passage previously noted in *Julian and Maddalo* whose interpretation was less sure. Other evidence, such as Mary Shelley's inadequate knowledge of Shelley's later work, as instance *Prometheus* and *The Witch*, point to the same conclusion, the imperfect understanding which char-



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acterized the last four years of their marriage. The cause of that partial failure lay, in Shelley's belief, in her coldness, and to that coldness is due in part the despair which characterizes some of his lyrics. It is not the sole cause surely, nor perhaps the chief, for that lay, I believe, in the contemplation of an unhappy world which he felt powerless to aid.

It is the vision of Emily which awakens him in the chill cavern where he lay. He wishes thenceforth to be governed by—

Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth,  
This world of love, this *me*; and into birth  
Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart  
Magnetic might into its central heart.

Emily is to be the sun, as Mary is the moon. The figure, that of magnetic attraction of the spheres, and the imparting of force by one to another, he employs also in *Prometheus* and in *The Witch* and is further evidence of the pervasive character of his scientific imagery. Into this solar system is to be brought, too, the Comet—

Who drew the heart of this frail Universe  
Towards thine own; till, wrecked in that convulsion,  
Alternating attraction and repulsion,  
Thine went astray, and that was rent in twain;  
Oh, float into our azure heaven again!

This must mean Harriet Westbrook. In the universe of harmonious love, Sun, Moon, Comet, and Earth are to exist, shedding each a magnetic influence upon the others and moving in its own prescribed orbit. The figure, in its impersonality, rather transcends its polygamous implication.

The conclusion of the poem, with its invitation to Emilia to take ship with him for the paradise of their Ionian Isle is, however, scarcely cosmic or Platonic. It is a prothalamium for an imaginary honeymoon, a dream of love fulfilment in which the sensuous and the ideal are blent to passion. Its ardor and yet its freedom from vulgarity are characteristic of Shelley at his best, of his power to spiritualize the flesh without denying it. It is neither wholly pagan in its sensuousness, for it dignifies sexual love, nor, even less, is it Christian, being neither ascetic nor furtive. If, as I believe, the importance of Shelley's philosophy lies in its synthesis of the best elements in the pagan and the Christian philosophies, it is in his conceptions of beauty and of

love that its influence has been and will be most enduringly felt, it being conceded, of course, that for the proper expression of beauty and love there is needed a social system far other than that we know today. Shelley detested equally grossness and a cold and ascetic denial of the flesh. And as between lovers there must be equality. The woman must be as free as the man. Love, unless freely given, is not love but lust. That in the world as now constituted, with its inequalities and its passion of private ownership, perfect love was rarely possible, Shelley in his maturity perceived. His dream of a union with all the three women he loved was, he knew, no more than a dream. And the dream of a more passionate union than he had known, a union with a woman less cold than his wife, he permitted to be no more than a dream. He might, presumably, have escaped somewhere with his idealized Emilia. But he knew that she was not all that he described her as being and he had, too, his obligations to Mary. In this imperfect world it was unlikely the latter would make a third to the elopement.

Biography nowadays abounds with nonsense about sex. It would seem that literature is no more than a by-product of the sex instinct. Whether the Freudians are responsible for this overemphasis or whether scandal-loving biographers have misused the Freudian psychology for their own commercial ends is hard to say. But even before Freud and his school were known Shelley had been the theme of a scandal interest and more pages were devoted to discussing his domestic affairs than to explaining his ideas. A man singularly chaste was, by reason of his unconventionality and honesty, made out by his enemies to be immoral. The animus behind these attacks was political and social. Shelley was an enemy of what present-day radicals call the "system," and the oldest dodge in political defamation is to call your nefarious opponent "immoral." Had Shelley's political views been conventional and had he avoided the divorce court he might have kept a dozen mistresses or been a homosexual and nothing would have been said of his "immorality." English society of Regency days could scarcely censure immoral conduct provided it were along traditional lines and did not assail accepted ideas. To elope with Mary Godwin while married to Harriet was a trivial matter, but to attempt to justify it on grounds of an unconventional morality was heresy.

Shelley's justification to himself for that elopement was, I believe, sincere. He had small respect for conventions, for traditional forms, as such. He believed his motives to be good and had the courage, therefore, to follow his desires. Had he thought Harriet in love with

him I believe he would have acted differently, but Harriet, probably at the instigation of Eliza, was endeavoring to force him to yield to her social aspirations and at a time when his money difficulties were great. Certainly he found in her none of the love and understanding he badly needed. Whether she was unfaithful to him, or he believed that she was, is of less importance than that she had failed him and that by reason of her nature, as he had come to realize, she must continue to fail him. She was not sufficiently intelligent. Nor did Mary Godwin prove in the end sufficiently intelligent, though far more an intellectual companion to him than Harriet could ever be. Worse defect, Mary was lacking in passion and in the perceptiveness which would have enabled her to give him understanding and tender affection when he most needed them, substitutes adequate, perhaps, in the lack of passion. Shelley desired someone who was tender, passionate, and intelligent and some years were needed for him to learn that such a combination is rare and that he was unlikely to encounter it. A woman composed of Harriet, Mary, and Emilia, as he fancied the latter to be, would have come close to meeting his needs. He was aware, when he wrote *Epipsychidion*, that his ideal was a dream maiden, incarnation of Venus, Diana, and Minerva. He drew her ideal portrait as Asia, as the Witch, and as the Lady of the garden. He did not expect to meet her in this world.

That Shelley desired a far more liberal sex morality than prevailed in his day is clear from several explicit statements. He admired Lawrence's *Empire of the Nairs* with its South Sea Island code of sex morals. He wished women to be men's equals in every respect and to confer their love as they saw fit, uncoerced by marriage or economic necessity. This was the ideal which, in *Prometheus*, he describes as realizable only in Utopia; when, that is, all human beings were good and love was more than a physical appetite and become a "divine nepenthe." What was proper to do meanwhile is not so clear. Marriage as it then prevailed was a tyrannical institution giving the husband a property right in his wife. This Shelley wholly condemned. He condemned with even greater horror commercialized vice for the degradation it involved both to men and women. Perhaps had an easy system of divorce prevailed as now in the Scandinavian countries and in Russia and were women the economic equals of men he would have been fairly content. Such freedom did not, of course, prevail in England either then or now. His elopement with Mary brought tragedy to Harriet and unhappiness upon himself and Mary. The alternative was, perhaps, to remain Harriet's nominal husband

and to make Mary his mistress. His world would have deemed this a satisfactory solution and would not have condemned him for it. To him it would have been deeply immoral, conformity to false conventions, essential untruth. There was a third alternative, the virtuous renunciation of Mary and of anyone else who might arouse his love, and subservience to a loveless marriage. This seemed to him immoral also, for it would be to deny love. He saw no virtue in asceticism. Any one of the three choices was sure to cause suffering to some one. Shelley chose according to his youth and his beliefs. That Harriet's subsequent tragedy weighed upon him is evident. That he would or could do otherwise than he did, were it to do over, there is no evidence that he believed. Right and wrong, which he had once thought so easily distinguished, had proved the most perplexing problem in a perplexed world.

It is impossible to assess, in seeking the causes of despondency in Shelley's poetry, the unhappiness due to an unsatisfactory marriage and that due to his contemplation of a world torn by war, suffering, and injustice. Much of his depression arose, too, from a sense of futility. He was conscious of great literary powers; yet the world rejected everything he wrote. There were abuses in society which cried to be remedied, but his exile and his ill-health made it impossible for him to take a hand in their destruction. The happiest of marriages, the rarest of wives, would not have sufficed to make him content with his seeming uselessness. The tonic which he needed was a little recognition; scarcely public acclaim, for that he would have suspected, but recognition among his fellow writers. Even from them he got very little. And yet he persisted in writing and in the years 1819 and 1820 produced much verse and of the highest excellence. That it reflects his despondency is not surprising. What is surprising is that he found heart and energy to write at all. Some of the more important works of 1820 in addition to those already mentioned may be best considered here.

Two of the most important are of a political character, the *Ode to Naples* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Swellfoot the Tyrant*. The former, written in August, 1820, was inspired by the news of the establishment of constitutional government in Naples and the overthrow of tyranny. Its technical virtuosity in handling the formal ode structure is great but it affords little that is new in Shelley's thought. He rejoices in the revolution that has overthrown tyranny and hails it as the portent of greater liberty to come. There are, also, one or two touches of Platonism: |

## 346 A Stratosphere of Prophetic Thought

I sailed where ever flows  
Under the calm Serene  
A spirit of deep emotion  
From the unknown graves  
Of the dead kings of Melody.

He is seized with the spirit of prophecy which, deriving from this realm, broods—

Over the oracular woods and divine sea.

The idea is that expressed in *Prometheus* by the Spirits who come to comfort the Titan, prophetic spirits which—

As the thoughts of man's own mind  
Float through all above the grave;  
We make there our liquid lair,  
Voyaging cloudlike and unpent  
Through the boundless element:  
Thence we bear the prophecy  
Which begins and ends in thee!

The idea in both is that the earth is enveloped, as by a super-atmosphere, with an ether in which exist the best thoughts of man, of the seers and poets, and that from this realm of thought it is possible to derive inspired prophecy. He speaks also of the—

Great Spirit, deepest Love!  
Which rulest and dost move  
All things which live and are, within the Italian shore.

This Spirit he later characterizes as the Spirit of Beauty. The identification of the Creative Spirit with Love and Beauty is in Shelley's characteristic vein of Platonism.

*Oedipus Tyrannus*, written also in the summer of 1820, is of a wholly different character, being satiric in tone. It arose out of the circumstances attendant upon the inquiry into the conduct of Queen Caroline. The chief characters represent the Prince Regent, Lord Castlereagh, Lord Eldon, and the Duke of Wellington, the statesmen most execrated by the liberals of the time. The poem was, Mrs. Shelley tells us, "stifled at the very dawn of its existence by the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice.'" It had been published anonymously. That it was so quickly suppressed is not surprising. Swellfoot's opening

lines, wherein he soliloquizes, sufficiently denote its irreverent character:

Thou supreme goddess! by whose power divine  
These graceful limbs are clothed in proud array  
Of gold and purple, and this kingly paunch  
Swells like a sail before a favoring breeze,  
And these most sacred nether promontories  
Lie satisfied with layers of fat; and these  
Boeotian cheeks, like Egypt's pyramid,  
(Nor with less toil were their foundations laid)  
Sustain the cone of my untroubled brain,  
That point, the emblem of a pointless nothing!

Swellfoot is surrounded by his subjects, hungry swine, and over the altar of the temple in which the scene is laid is the statue of Famine, veiled. The swine demand food and Swellfoot, outraged at such treason, demands that they be gelded. The passage is an evident hit at Malthus, for,

Moral restraint I see has no effect,  
Nor prostitution, nor our own example,  
Starvation, typhus-fever, war, nor prison.

Shelley, from the evidence of his letters, believed that Malthus suggested sterilization as a means to prevent overpopulation.

Purganax, Lord Castlereagh, declares that the "troops grow mutinous, the revenue fails," whereat Mammon suggests that he "decimate some regiments" and proposes, if money is the need, to "coin paper." Greater danger resides, however, in an oracle which has announced that when a "Consort-Queen shall hunt a King with hogs" the alternatives are that Boeotia must choose either "reform or civil war." Various stratagems are hit upon to avert the doom impending but that of Mammon, the Green Bag, is chosen. Queen Iona if baptized with the liquor it contains will be proved either innocent or guilty—or so the swine can be made to believe.

This, trust a priest, is just the sort of thing  
Swine will believe.

Purganax, addressing the assembled swine, persuades them to the trial of the Green Bag. The Queen is summoned and seizing the poisonous liquor she pours it upon Swellfoot and his ministers who are at once converted into swine. His subjects, devouring the food prepared for

the feast of famine, are transformed to their native shapes of John Bulls and led by the Queen hunt down the miserable swine who had formerly ruled them, Swellfoot and the rest. The parable or allegory is simple enough: the starved masses, seizing food, become their true selves and overturn the tyranny which had abused them.

It would be interesting to see what the effect had been of such a vicious satire had it been widely disseminated. I suspect not great. Its classical terminology and ingenious imagery would have been grasped only by the educated. As in all Shelley's political satires, the humor is of too caustic a nature to excite mirth. The lines are pointed and epigrammatic. Swellfoot says to Laoctonos (Wellington),

... Yes, you have drunk more wine,  
And shed more blood, than any man in Thebes.

This is a telling sentence but scarcely amusing. Shelley felt human suffering too acutely to be an effective satirist. The state of England and the misery of its people were too real for him to laugh the Prince Regent, Wellington, and Castlereagh out of power. Byron could not do so much, but one suspects *The Vision of Judgment* to have been vastly more effective politically than many a satire written in Shelley's manner. Byron could laugh at the absurdities and stupidities of kings and their ministers because the evil which they had done did not come so sharply home to him. The "else unfelt oppressions of this earth" were not for him an ever-present reality. Shelley never derived genuine amusement from the contemplation of human stupidity and cruelty.

There are, besides, in the poems written in 1820, a number of lyrics, from such relatively long ones as *To a Skylark* and *Arethusa* to poems so short as the well known "I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden." The virtuosity and delicacy of these is generally appreciated and but for some metrical analysis of a recondite order or some musical study of their tonal subtlety there is little that the critic can record. As a projection of Shelley's thought, as an expression of his character, they seem to me to reveal a growing detachment, a more impersonal artistry than is commonly found in his poetry of earlier years. They are less subjective even though they echo a personal emotion. The mood has been externalized and universalized. They are calmer lyrics than he once could write and therefore better. It is observable, too, that they record the phenomena of earth—flowers, trees, rivers, and mountains—with a copiousness and accuracy which also connote the

growing objectivity of mind which has been remarked. The fact suggests that he had at last achieved a personal philosophy in which he had reconciled the doubts and contradictions evident in his early struggle to find a unified belief. That the philosophy so achieved, a fusion, as has been shown, of Platonism, science, and theoretical anarchism, was wholly satisfactory may be doubted. But it was at least a resting place; it marked a pause preparatory to some fresh advance whose direction he died too soon to indicate unless this was to be a confirmation of, and a growing conviction in, Platonism, an inference which is made plausible by such works as *Adonais* and *A Defence of Poetry* of the year 1821.



## CHAPTER XVI

### *Defence of Poetry, Adonais*



SHELLEY's letters to the Olliers enclosing various poems for publication and asking news of the reception accorded works already published reveal pretty clearly his attitude towards criticism and its effect on his productivity. He writes, January 20, of *The Cenci* that the reviews "on the whole give me as much encouragement as a person of my habits of thinking is capable of receiving from such a source, which is, inasmuch as they coincide with, and confirm, my own decisions. My next attempt (if I should write more) will be a drama, in the composition of which I shall attend to the advice of my critics, to a certain degree, but I doubt whether I *shall* write more. I could be content either with the Hell or the Paradise of poetry; but the torments of its purgatory vex me, without exciting my power sufficiently to put an end to the vexation." Shelley was habituated to hostility and abuse but an author must possess a sublime confidence in his genius who can proceed to write in the face of indifference. Though Shelley could not but know that he possessed unusual powers, if the world ignored them persistently of what use was it to publish? In his four years in Italy he produced a considerable amount of poetry; yet that it was but a part of what, under more stimulating conditions, he could have turned out I think is self-evident. He had long periods of dejection in which he could do no more than read and translate. The large poetical projects which he then had in mind seemed too formidable to undertake without the stimulus of an audience. His early death, of course, deprived the world of much which he would have produced even under adverse conditions, but his failure to strike a response with that which he published during his lifetime undoubtedly greatly restricted what otherwise he would have written in the years 1818-1822.

\ Writing is after all a social art. It presupposes an audience. The poet who, in the face of total neglect, persists in writing must have confidence in his ultimate success or be without sense of social obligation. Shelley was first of all a reformer and teacher, a man with a strong sense of duty to his kind. His ill-health and his Italian residence precluded an active part in English affairs. There was left only his pen, and it seemed that what he wrote made little impression, was

not wanted. A numbing sense of futility is at the root of Shelley's dejection, a more potent force than domestic unhappiness in reducing him to impotence and despair. The wonder is that in the face of repeated failures he continued to write at all. Great artists in music, painting, and verse have many of them experienced neglect and misunderstanding. It is a commonplace that a mediocre talent is a better guarantee of success than is genius. Yet few geniuses have had as little encouragement as Shelley to persist in the arts to which they were called, save perhaps Mozart and Schubert, who in their copiousness and spontaneity suggest Shelley. Shelley's audience consisted virtually of half a dozen friends, whose encouragement he must suspect was due to personal liking. Mary Shelley, I believe, failed him. That she should urge him to give heed to the Reviews and write something that would please, measures sufficiently the degree of her understanding. She too, no doubt, like the larger world, is to be more pitied than condemned. Yet the hard fact remains that she was inadequate to her opportunity and could not give what Shelley needed, the understanding which would strengthen in him that self-confidence without which any good work is impossible. Shelley would have had to be far more conceited than was possible to so modest a nature to think of his life and work in any way other than as failures.

Yet Shelley had great imaginative energy and after each period of dejection returned again to the exultant exercise of his powers. He was young and he had his moments of faith in which he looked into the heart of things and knew his kinship to the creative force of the world. The energy of these renewed attacks was not, however, unabated. His enthusiasm, his incentive to work, slackens perceptibly in the last year and a half of his life. There is no decline in quality but it is a time less fertile than the years 1819 and 1820. Projects are taken up and left unfinished. Of the play *Charles I* which he planned, only a fragment remains. *Hellas* was a "mere improvise," and *The Triumph of Life* was left incomplete. These are invaluable for what they reveal of Shelley's thought but they are only a promise of what might have been. In poetry, *Adonais*, and in prose, *A Defence of Poetry*, remain, for the last eighteen months of his life, the sole works, other than a handful of lyrics, which do him justice as an artist. But for these his late work is increasingly fragmentary. That the fragments are often exquisite does not lessen the loss to posterity of work unwritten and of projects begun and laid aside unfinished.

The first mention of Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* to which Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* was written in answer is in a letter of January 20, 1821, to the Olliers. Shelley writes that it "has excited my polemical faculties so violently, that the moment I get rid of my ophthalmia I mean to set about an answer to it." To Peacock he writes, February 15: "I received...your printed denunciations against general, and your written ones against particular, poetry; and I agree with you as decidedly in the latter as I differ in the former. The man whose critical gall is not stirred up by such *ottava rimas* as Barry Cornwall's, may safely be conjectured to possess no gall at all. The world is pale with the sickness of such stuff. At the same time, your anathemas against poetry itself excited me to a sacred rage, or *caloëthes scribendi* of vindicating the insulted Muses. I had the greatest possible desire to break a lance with you, within the lists of a magazine, in honour of my mistress Urania; but God willed that I should be too lazy, and wrested the victory from your hope; since first having unhorsed poetry, and the universal sense of the wisest in all ages, an easy conquest would have remained to you in me, the knight of the shield of shadow and the lance of gossamere. Besides, I was at that moment reading Plato's 'Ion,' which I recommend you to reconsider." The essay was, however, written and sent to Ollier on March 20. It was inscribed Part I but no other of the projected three parts was composed. The *Literary Miscellany* for which it was intended desisted with the first number and the essay was taken by John Hunt for publication in the *Liberal*, which also died. The *Defence* was, therefore, not published until 1840, when it appeared with the *Essays* and was characterized by Mrs. Shelley as "the only entirely finished prose work Shelley left."

It is in wholly a different strain from Peacock's amusing and tart essay. Peacock had said in effect that poetry was the natural expression of primitive peoples but that its originality departed with the growth of civilization and that with the increase of knowledge it was surpassed by the sciences and became the preoccupation only of petty minds. Peacock's position is that of the common-sense rationalist who considers reason the highest of human attributes. Shelley's is that of the mystic, to whom intuition surpasses reason. Shelley employs, however, as the terms of his antithesis, not reason and intuition but reason and imagination, for imagination is a more comprehensive term than intuition and connotes activity rather than passivity. It is with a definition of these terms that Shelley begins his essay: "According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action,

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which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity." The definition helps to explain Shelley's ambiguous comment elsewhere that mind does not create, by which he means, I take it, the passive mind, or reason. Reason is contemplative whereas imagination is active, creative, a theory which is in accord with that of the neo-Platonists, who assign to the imagination of the One the creative power in the universe, and to the imagination of man a lesser creative power in the realm of earthly things. "Reason," Shelley concludes, "is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance."

The basis of the argument is thus established at the outset. Shelley, as a good Platonist, gives to reason a subordinate place among man's mental powers. It acts at the behest of a higher, a guiding principle, which he identifies with the imagination. "Poetry," he goes on to say, "in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination.'" Clearly "poetry" is thus employed ambiguously and Shelley's exact meaning will emerge only in the development of his theme. He proceeds with an analysis of the effect which impressions produce upon the mind. They are not merely recorded. The mind reacts to them and composes them to harmony. In primitive man the pleasurable reaction to experience is expressed in "language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation." Man more highly evolved, social man, acquires "an additional class of emotions" which "produces an augmented treasure of expression; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony. The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is

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social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind." The subject threatens to get out of hand and to "involve an inquiry into the principles of society itself." Shelley determines therefore to restrict his view "to the manner in which the imagination is expressed upon its forms."

In the imitation of natural objects in dance, music, and words there is, Shelley asserts, "a certain rhythm or order." The various imitations are similar but not identical. That which most approximates this order gives an intenser and purer pleasure than any other. "The sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers." Those in which the sense of approximation "exists to excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word." Their expression of it is "vitality metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension." The language of this expression needs constantly to be renewed or it becomes "dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. . . . In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression." Poets thus perceive order in seemingly disordered experience or impose order upon it. Therefore poets in the broad sense include more than practitioners of the arts. "They are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. Hence all original religions are allegorical, or susceptible of allegory, and like Janus have a double face of false and true." It is a significant passage and explains Shelley's rationalization of myth in *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas*.

In this discussion is implicit a Platonic concept which Shelley does not bring into the open, though it would have made his argument clearer had he done so. He in effect postulates a divine order, truth, and beauty, existing in the immaterial world of ideas, a world to which the creative or poetic mind has occasional access. It is in the light of its intimations from this world—what for want of a better word must be called intuitions—that the creative mind apprehending it imposes its imaginative reading, its discovery of relationships, upon actual experience and thus aids in shaping the actual into a likeness

of the divine. Thus the poetic or creative mind is prophetic in character. The poet "not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. . . . A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one." The language here is definitely Platonistic. The implication is that the world of the actual tends to shape itself in accordance with the divine pattern. This pattern is disclosed to it—not completely but partially and intermittently—by those creative minds which are most closely in touch with the divine mind, the One. These are therefore prophetic of the more perfect adaptation towards which the world of the actual strives.

"Poetic" is to Shelley more nearly synonymous with "creative." "Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry." He proceeds to consider poetry in the narrower sense as "those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is contained within the invisible nature of man." Language is the greatest of instruments, surpassing the media of the other arts. Only legislators and religious founders and they only "so long as their institutions last" can enjoy hope of so enduring fame as that enjoyed by the great poets. But why poets rather than writers of prose? Wherein lies the "distinction between measured and unmeasured language"? In the language of poets there is "a sort of uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry." Translation from one language to another vainly strives to re-create this harmony: "The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower." Metre, however, though a practice "convenient and popular," is not essential to "measured language," which may be either in verse or prose. "The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error." Thus "Plato was essentially a poet." So too was Lord Bacon whose "language has a sweet and majestic rhythm." And "all the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors . . . but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music." Here, it is apparent, Shelley is employing the word "poet" in two senses: in the larger sense of creative mind; and in the narrower sense of master of measured language. Conversely the employment of "traditional forms of rhythm" does not preclude the writer from being a poet also in

the high and philosophic sense. "Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton... are philosophers of the very loftiest power."

Shelley proceeds to discuss the difference between a poem and a story, the permanence of the one existing in its relation to eternal truth, the evanescence of the other lying in its record of particular facts which necessarily are transitory and impermanent. "Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and for ever developes new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains.... A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted." It follows, therefore, that "parts of a composition may be poetical without the composition as a whole being a poem." Herodotus, Plutarch, and Livy are poets, though not wholly or consistently so.

"Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight." It endures long and its full value is apprehended only over long periods of time. "Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame." Nor is the greatness of poetry incompatible with the inclusion of errors peculiar to the particular age in which it was written. "Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors; Revenge is the naked idol of the worship of a semibarbarous age; and Self-deceit is the veiled image of unknown evil, before which luxury and satiety lie prostrate. But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty.... Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, etc., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears. The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man." Its field is not that of ethical science. "It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought." Poetry awakens the mind to a perception of love and beauty. "The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own.... The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers

to the effect by acting upon the cause....Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither."

Periods of human history remarkable for great poetry are remarkable also for advances in other arts. When poetry flourished in ancient Athens, architecture, painting, music, sculpture, and philosophy flourished also. The Athenian drama has never been surpassed save possibly in the single instance of Shakespeare. "The Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institution, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power." A union of so many arts is unknown to the modern stage. This perfection of dramatic writing, staging, and performance was coincident with the high degree of civilization attained by the Greeks, for it is a matter of common observation that the degree of elevation or degradation of the stage is an index of the manners of the age. Whereas the Greek tragedy was elevating and ennobling in its effects, tragedies of a degenerate age, such as that of Charles II, were debasing in their effects. Comedy likewise was of an inferior order, remarkable for its obscenity, "which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life." He concludes that "It is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life."

The decline of the Greek states is marked by a softening of the arts. The bucolic poets are marked with an excess of sweetness and the lack of the profound thought which characterized the preceding literature. "It is not what the erotic poets have, but what they have not, in which their imperfection consists. It is not inasmuch as they were poets, but inasmuch as they were not poets, that they can be considered with any plausibility as connected with the corruption of their age." The evidence of social corruption is first observable in the imagination and the intellect and it ends by destroying all sensibility to pleasure. "At the approach of such a period, poetry ever addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed, and its voice is heard, like the footsteps of Astraea, departing from



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the world." Those of the citizens of Syracuse and Alexandria who enjoyed the poetry of Theocritus "were less cold, cruel, and sensual than the remnant of their tribe." Poetry does not cease save with the decay of the whole social fabric and it has always within itself the seeds of its renewal. Those born to a happier age than that of degenerate Greece may regard the later bucolic and erotic poetry as "episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the coöperating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world."

Rome, less remarkable than Greece for its skill in the arts, had yet Lucretius and Virgil together with lesser poets and historians. "The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions." The great deeds of the ancient Romans "were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas. . . . These things are not the less poetry. . . . They are the episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men." When the ancient system had completed the cycle of its evolution it was succeeded by chivalric and Christian institutions. Whatever evil these may have contained was not due to the poetry in them. The words of Christ, however later distorted, were "instinct with the most vivid poetry." And from the "dust and blood of this fierce chaos" which characterized the centuries after the fall of Rome "mark how beautiful an order has sprung." Both the poetry in the doctrines of Christ and the "mythology and institutions of the Celtic conquerors of the Roman empire, outlived the darkness and the convulsions connected with their growth and victory." The ignorance of the dark ages was not due to Christian doctrines or the predominance of the Celtic nations. "Whatever of evil their agencies may have contained sprang from the extinction of the poetical principle, connected with the progress of despotism and superstition. Men, from causes too intricate to be here discussed, had become insensible and selfish: their own will had become feeble, and yet they were its slaves, and thence the slaves of the will of others." It is an idea already familiar from Shelley's expression of it in *Julian and Maddalo*, *Prometheus*, and elsewhere, this insistence upon the will's decay in its surrender of its own sovereignty. Moral freedom, which lies at the root of all civilization and progress, is within the domain of the will itself to accept or to deny.

"It was not," Shelley continues, "until the eleventh century that

the effects of the poetry of the Christian and chivalric systems began to manifest themselves." Here the word "poetry" is clearly used, as in the first pages of the essay, to mean creative ideas which are in accord with the divine order. Chief among these was the "principle of equality," which, deriving from Plato, became one of the teachings of Christianity. The abolition of slavery and the emancipation of women became one of the practical consequences, the one "the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive," the other the prerequisite of a higher order of sexual love than had ever before prevailed. The troubadours, Petrarch, and Dante celebrate the new idealization of love which in Dante is made symbolical of union with the divine. "His apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise, and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry." Succeeding writers "have celebrated the dominion of love, planting as it were trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force." Thus Dante serves as a bridge to unite the ancient and modern worlds. Dante, and after him Milton, though employing the symbols of the prevailing theology, were liberated minds. Satan in *Paradise Lost* was not "intended for the popular personification of evil. Implacable hate, patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and, although venial in a slave, are not to be forgiven in a tyrant." Therein Shelley in part declares the theme of *Prometheus Unbound*. "Milton," Shelley writes, "has so far violated the popular creed . . . as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his god over his devil."

Dante, "deeply penetrated with the ancient religion of the civilized world . . . was the first religious reformer" and prophet of the renaissance of learning. Even now he has power, and many of his words "yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight"—a passage which employs figures of which Shelley is fond. Yet despite this great service of poetry in the past the modern world declares that the exercise of reason is more useful. Shelley proceeds to discuss the claims of pleasure and utility. Pleasure is of two kinds, the one permanent, the

other transitory. "Utility may either express the means of producing the former or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful." Utility which ministers to animal wants and seeks security for mankind is of the highest value but may lead to abuse. "Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and of want. They have exemplified the saying, 'To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away.' The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty."

Poetry and not mere fact is the world's need: "We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry, in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least what is wiser and better than what men now practice and endure.... We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened, have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? Poetry, and the principle of Self of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world."

Perhaps no other single passage in Shelley's prose equals this in its realistic discernment of the ills of human society—as true now as then—and their cause and cure. It is lack of imagination which enslaves us. That, Shelley profoundly understood. Poetry, he declared, "is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life." Poetry ascends "to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar. . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds." He ascribes to the poetical faculty, the imagination which enables the human mind to transcend its habitual self, a divinity like that which it reports. Poetic imagination, the creative faculty—whatever be its designation—is the proof of and the means to man's intercourse with some larger mind than his own. The background of the thought is Platonic. The human mind is shut away as in a cave from the reality without but in its best moments it glimpses a shadow of that reality and reports it in poetry, whether of act or word. The mystical apprehension of these moments of reality is not due to the exercise of the will. It cannot be commanded. It is seemingly intuitive, though Shelley does not in this place employ the word.

Poetry "strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms." The idea is that familiar to Platonic thought: the world of the actual half conceals, half reveals, the real world of which it is a shadow. In our moments of enlightenment we see into the heart of things and perceive the eternal of which the transitory is only a symbol. Shelley more than most men was repeatedly awakened to this invisible reality, lived perpetually in a state of wonder. "Poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. . . . It makes us the inhabitant of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being." That the poetry of his own day marked a reawakening of a sense of wonder and was an augury of a new and better society, Shelley believed. A literary awakening always has "preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will. . . . Our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live

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among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty." Therefore he concludes that "poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration . . . the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

*A Defence of Poetry* is the most revealing of Shelley's prose works by reason of its length and completeness and because, coming near the end of his life, it expresses his mature thought. The esthetic philosophy which it expounds is linked with his social philosophy. Poetry is defined as the measured expression in words of that revelation of the divine thought which finds expression likewise in the other arts and in social institutions. Whether consciously or no, poetry, when exuberant and great, is the reflection of a creative age. Its decay accompanies the decadence of society. This linking of the arts with institutions and of both with a unifying metaphysics reveals the philosophical character of Shelley's mind and his attainment, after years of effort, of faith. Whether this faith is absolute or tentative only it is not easy to say. He had, however, accepted, at least as an hypothesis explanatory of the actual universe and of mind, the ideas of Platonism; though these are modified by the speculations of neo-Platonism and of subsequent philosophies, including that of science. Whatever this belief was, and its character is not wholly to be determined on the evidence of a single essay, its comprehensiveness and unity are at least evident. His was a mind which was dissatisfied with partial explanations. Literary criticism, esthetic philosophy, and social philosophy must alike derive from a basic metaphysics. The part is explicable only as the whole is explicable. Unless this need in Shelley for philosophic completeness is understood, neither his development as a poet nor the full meaning of his chief works can be grasped.<sup>1</sup>

Forever should be dispelled also that delusion which Hogg so sedulously strove to create that Shelley was a fantastic creature unable to cope with or to understand the actual world. The truth is the direct opposite. He saw only too clearly the nature of men and the institutions which they have made. If in a few instances deceived, through his affections and a misplaced trust, he yet saw life as a whole with that terrible clarity which is the gift of distinguished minds. The world of human misery and selfishness was almost more than he could contemplate; yet he did not avert his eyes but sought to find an explanation for it and for those things also which are so curiously commingled with it, beauty, love, and unselfishness. These also are a

part of life. Are they to be thought the only reality and evil and pain an illusion? Shelley did not take so easy a way out. It might be that love and beauty were the permanent and final realities which were attainable through the free choice of man. Meanwhile there was the evident reality of a world in the grasp of evil. In *A Defence of Poetry* Shelley characterizes the world of his own day, which is our world also, without softening or evasion. It is a world of cruelty, injustice, and selfishness. He puts his finger unerringly upon the cause of evil. Men desire happiness but they confuse the means to it. Happiness is not to be found in a shortsighted materialism. Reason, unless directed by imagination, leads nowhere but to futility. We have knowledge, material things, and command over natural forces; but these are nothing in themselves and make us only more and more unhappy unless, prompted by intuition from the divine, we shape them imaginatively to the uses of a freer and less selfish social order. This is not the analysis and teaching of a visionary, but realism of the toughest kind. It is inspired common-sense. It is not Shelley who is fantastic and insane but the world of "practical" men.

Shelley's relation to Keats seems never to have been intimate and of extant letters there is but the one which invited him to Italy. Yet there are several passages in letters to others, to the Olliers and to Hunt, which allude to Keats in flattering terms. In a letter of May 14, 1820, Shelley writes to the Olliers: "Keats, I hope, is going to show himself a great poet; like the sun to burst through the clouds, which, though dyed in the finest colours of the air, obscured his rising." To Marianne Hunt he writes, November 11, 1820: "Where is Keats now? I am anxiously expecting him in Italy, when I shall take care to bestow every possible attention on him. I consider his a most valuable life, and I am deeply interested in his safety. I intend to be the physician both of his body and his soul, to keep the one warm, and to teach the other Greek and Spanish. I am aware, indeed, in part, that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me; and this is an additional motive, and will be an added pleasure." Again, on February 15, 1821, he asks, writing to Peacock, "Among your anathemas of the modern attempts in poetry, do you include Keats's 'Hyperion'? I think it very fine. His other poems are worth little; but if the 'Hyperion' be not grand poetry, none has been produced by our contemporaries." On February 18, 1821, writing to Clare Clairmont, Shelley adds as a postscript, "Keats is very ill at Naples—I have written to him to ask him to come to Pisa, without however inviting him into our own house. We are not rich enough for that

sort of thing. Poor fellow!" Shelley was at that time ignorant of Keats's true residence. Five days later, on February 23, Keats died in Rome.

*Adonais*, therefore, written in June, 1821, is not an elegy expressive of deep personal loss. To Clare he writes June 8, "I have lately been composing a poem on Keats; it is better than anything that I have yet written, and worthy both of him and of me." Other of his comments on the poem reveal his satisfaction with it but also emphasize its impersonality. He speaks of it as "a highly wrought *piece of art*, and perhaps better in point of composition, than anything I have written." And again, "The *Adonais*, in spite of its mysticism, is the least imperfect of my compositions, and, as the image of my regret and honour for poor Keats, I wish it to be so." The poem is to be thought of then as a formal elegy, somewhat on the order of *Lycidas*. Such, I confess, it seems to me, especially in its opening stanzas, which have a certain coldness and even artificiality of ornamentation. It is only as he comes to write what is, in effect, an elegy upon himself that the poem becomes warm and moving. Even better is it when it transcends both Keats and himself and in its expression of his mystical ideas reaches a beauty which in its particular kind is equalled only by parts of *Prometheus*. It is this expression of his philosophy which has the greatest interest for one who pursues the development of Shelley's mind.

The exhortation to Urania to weep the death of her son, seems, as I have remarked, a formal device which in the grace of its wording excites respect rather than any deeper emotion. With the ninth stanza a theme is introduced which, though developed conventionally, has yet philosophic implications of considerable interest. Thoughts, Desires, Adorations, Wingèd Persuasions, Splendors, and Glooms, creations of the brain of *Adonais* are described as mourning his death. This is perhaps more than a conceit, a pretty figure of speech, for as has been elsewhere noted, Shelley seemingly believed in a heaven of thought surrounding the earth, a kind of intellectual stratosphere. It is from this that come the thoughts and hopes which comfort Prometheus in his agony. These enduring thoughts, auguries of a happier destiny, constitute presumably the realm of the divine ideas. Elsewhere in *Prometheus* Shelley speaks also of all "the dreams and the light imaginings of men" and, too, "all that faith creates or love desires" as having an existence in the underworld. The idea seemingly is that thought and imagination actually create images which have an existence independent of their creator; that man is creative as God is

creative and that his imaginings have a real existence. If this mystical idea is to be accepted the poetic creatures whom Adonais has created survive him and mourn him. Does Shelley mean this literally or is it but a poetic way of saying that Keats's poems will live after his death? To one wholly converted to mysticism, it is possible, perhaps, to believe in the independent existence of thoughts passionately conceived, of images passionately imagined—for intensity of emotion and imagination seem needful to their vitality—but to any other than a mystic the idea must seem no more than a figure of speech.

The poem turns then to the contemplation of death. What is it? The body of Adonais is altered: it is changed to its elements, "Nought we know dies." The question arises:

... Shall that alone which knows  
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath  
By sightless lightning? the intense atom glows  
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.

Does he here answer his own question? Does the "intense atom" of the mind glow only for a moment? Or does it persist though altered?

Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene  
The actors or spectators? Great and mean  
Meet massed in death, who lends what life must borrow.

All that is certain, he seems to say, is change, alternate death and life in changing forms. Urania in her grief mourns the poet's death as though death meant annihilation:

"A godlike mind soars forth, in its delight  
Making earth bare and veiling heaven, and when  
It sinks, the swarms that dimmed or shared its light  
Leave to its kindred lamps the spirit's awful night."

These lines would seem to imply the extinction of the godlike mind.

The stanzas immediately ensuing enumerate the poets, Byron, and Moore, and Shelley who mourn their companion's death. The stanzas in which Shelley writes unmistakably of himself justify Mrs. Shelley's comment that much of the poem "seems now more applicable to Shelley... than to the young and gifted poet whom he mourned." What he has to say of himself is true enough and the detachment is sufficiently remarkable, but there is a note which, if not self-pity, is self-dramatization. Shelley suffered at moments from a martyr com-



plex. That he was undeservedly maligned is true enough. He knew himself to be one of the world's benefactors whom the world rejects. Perhaps he was emotionally still too young to accept the rôle philosophically without drama and without self-pity. Yet the stanzas descriptive of his outlawry are such as to the taste of some were better unwritten. Shelley had sufficient moral courage for several men. There is, I think, no question of his resolution nor of the suffering he endured as a consequence of his unpopular opinions. Yet at times—not always—there is a lack of sturdiness in his resistance to the world, of Browningsque robustness, or of Byronic contempt. He did not, one feels, conceal his emotions sufficiently. It is all very well to feel oneself branded like Cain or crowned with thorns like Christ but yet a bit theatrical to say so. Doubtless the reader thus critical asks too much. If less intense, sensitive, and confessional Shelley would not have written other things which we could not afford to be without. Perhaps had he held *Adonais* for a year before publishing it, he would have revised the questionable stanzas and also those in which he cursed the anonymous reviewer who had ridiculed Keats. It is altogether too good a curse to be wasted on so unworthy an object.

It is with the less personal stanzas, the concluding fifteen or sixteen, that the poem becomes, in my judgment, truly great, and it is in them that Shelley expounds his Platonism. Precisely what his thought is in these it is necessary to determine, if it can be done, so that the degree of his belief in mystical philosophy may be gauged. In stanza XXXVIII occurs the first statement:

... but the pure spirit shall flow  
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,  
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow  
Through time and change, unquenchably the same.

The figure of the burning fountain is derived from the imagery of neo-Platonism and Shelley employs it in *The Witch of Atlas*. The spirit's return to it symbolizes its return to, and reabsorption in, the One, who is in neo-Platonism God, not a person but the infinite and mysterious source of energy and life. The passage, though it expresses a belief in the conservation of spiritual energy, would seem to imply also the loss of individual identity, to deny a personal immortality. Later stanzas, however, throw some doubt on this reading.

The next stanza, in continuation of the thought or of qualification thereof, begins:

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—  
He hath awakened from the dream of life—  
'Tis we, who, lost in stormy visions, keep  
With phantoms an unprofitable strife.

The thought is familiar to Platonism: The world of actuality is an illusion, a dream; reality lies without, beyond, and to it we return at death. Adonais is neither dead nor sleeping but now fully alive. He cannot, therefore, have lost his identity in his reunion with the One. So at least the lines would seem to imply, though subsequent lines would seem to cast a doubt on this conclusion. The next stanza, XL, introduces the ambiguity:

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;  
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
Can touch him not and torture not again.

Does this imply merely escape from worldly ills or complete lack of sentience? Stanza XLI declares,

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead not he;

and the next stanza declares,

He is made one with Nature; there is heard  
His voice in all her music, from the moan  
Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird;  
He is a presence to be felt and known  
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move  
Which has withdrawn his being to its own.

This clearly is pantheistic. The identity of Adonais is merged with the one power which pervades the universe.

Stanza XLIII develops the idea of pantheism:

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear  
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear.

What here is meant? The "one Spirit's plastic stress" that shapes recalcitrant matter to its own likeness is intelligible, but wherein can

Adonais, merged with it, "play his part" save as his spiritual energy is added to that of the one Spirit? Can he individually play a part? Stanza XLV states that he can, for great poets now dead greet him in a future life:

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown  
 Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,  
 Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton  
 Rose pale,—his solemn agony had not  
 Yet faded from him; Sidney as he fought

... and Lucan, by his death approved.

These and many more

Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.  
 "Thou art become as one of us!" they cry;  
 "It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long  
 Swung blind in unascended majesty."

This declares unmistakably that Adonais as an individual, as a creative mind, survives death and assumes his destined place in the constellation of poets.

The seeming paradox of individual survival and of reunion with the One involves the philosophical concept of union in multiplicity, of the one and the many. But though the idea is familiar and Shelley in *Prometheus* has dwelt upon it, it is easier to express in a figure of speech, such as the neo-Platonists employ, than in a reasoned prosaic argument. The Oriental concept of Nirvana is expressive of the same idea, the belief that the multifarious universe composed of an infinite number of particulars is at the same time a single thing, permeated by one spirit. Death affords an escape from the pain which is the concomitant of individual existence and permits ultimately reunion with God, who is all. Yet at the same time this reunion does not imply complete loss of personality. The soul survives as a cell which is yet a constituent part of a larger whole. Inevitably recourse must be had to analogy, to a figure of speech, to express what is all but logically inexpressible though emotionally felt. To be at one with the universe, with God, is an emotion common to mystical experience. It does not imply, seemingly, a loss of individuality but rather an enlargement thereof, though accompanied by a surrender of the self to something greater. The emotion of love is the analogy most

illuminating to common experience. The union with the One is seemingly some transcendent experience which is like human love but more expansive, more serene, less personal. So at least it must be if we are to accept, as we must, the evidence of the mystics. If not a universal experience it is yet one sufficiently common that it cannot be denied as a fact. Shelley pretty certainly had himself experienced it and in *Adonais* as elsewhere he endeavors figuratively to express it. *Adonais* survives death as an individual and he is yet made a part of the plastic spirit of the universe, who is the One; the seeming paradox is expressive of unity in multiplicity.

Thought, to the Platonist, is all that endures in a world of incessant change. Rome, where *Adonais* lies buried, is a sepulchre—

...ages, empires, and religions, there  
Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought.

But *Adonais*—

... is gathered to the kings of thought  
Who waged contention with their time's decay,  
And of the past are all that cannot pass away.

The stanzas which describe the cemetery in Rome where Keats is buried are strangely wistful and prophetic, as though Shelley intuitively knew his ashes also would soon lie there. It is as one who is fey that he writes his own requiem. I have no difficulty in believing this to be so: that he was aware of oncoming death and welcomed it. The nature of that "abode where the Eternal are" and for which he yearns remains obscure. He is certain only that it is reality and much to be desired:

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!

For himself all hopes have gone:

A light is passed from the revolving year,  
And man and woman; and what still is dear  
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.

It is therefore, perhaps, with the unvoiced wish that in death he may

lose his sense of self and his unhappy memories that he dwells last upon the divine world, the One as conceived by the Platonists:

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,  
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

It is, I think, the most concise as well as the most beautiful definition of the Platonic philosophy of the One, in whom are summed the absolutes of Truth, Love, and Beauty, and to which the mutable forms of matter imperfectly aspire. In the contemplation of the One the soul's desire for personal survival ceases. It trusts that All-Love, All-Goodness will know what is best. If Shelley conceives Adonais as surviving as one of the kings of song, as an immortal personality, the inference is that all souls are likewise immortal. But the fearful, the human, desire for such immortality ceases to be important in the soul's absorption in beauty. Does Shelley believe this with his reason? Or is it the projection of his hope only, the self-deception wherewith he assuages the too-great pain of living? The closely reasoned exposition of utility in *A Defence of Poetry* supports the Platonism of *Adonais*. That is most useful, he declares, which is the product of the creative imagination, working at the instigation of divine intuition. He accepts explicitly in this argument the existence in the universe of a Creative Mind of which the minds of men are a part, imperfect tools for the attainment of its end: the shaping of recalcitrant matter to conformity with the heavenly design. In such a philosophy human reason assumes a secondary, though important rôle. It is the instrument of imagination. Reason, unaided, can neither wholly accept nor wholly deny such a philosophy, for it cannot with understanding pass upon what is greater than itself. So Shelley believed in his most imaginative, his most creative moods. That he suffered also his moments of doubt when wholly under the domination of reason, when unenlightened by flashes of intuition, is, I believe, also true and wholly natural. But the moods of belief are none the less authentic for that and it is in them that he composed his greatest, his most enduring lines,

## CHAPTER XVII

### *'Joy Has Taken Flight'*



THE last year and a half of Shelley's life reveals no falling off in his intellectual interests despite the small number of completed poems he has left of that period. There are, besides *Adonais*, a few short lyrics, a considerable number of fragments, and the one long poem *Hellas* as witness to his creative activity. The evidence is unmistakable that in the face of the public's indifference to his work he was gradually ceasing to write save as some public event provoked a momentary flash or some emotional experience demanded for its relief poetic expression, but this only for himself or a few friends. The larger projects of plays and epic poems which he had planned came virtually to nothing. Had there been adequate incentive he would undoubtedly have written much more, for it was a time in his life of relative tranquillity and his poetic powers had not yet reached their maturity. It is reasonable to believe that the poetry which Shelley has left was but a part of what he could have written, had there been sufficient incentive, in his thirty years; also that, with longer life, he could have produced greater things than he did. Whether he would have done so is another question. It is more likely that he would have written some prose work on philosophy than another *Prometheus* or *Cenci*.

The letters of the period reveal somewhat his reading and the trend of his thought. As such they are valuable to anyone who would trace the history of Shelley's mind to its last recorded expression and note the serenity with which he overcame misfortune and looked upon a lifetime of failure, for not otherwise could he regard it. He had done nothing, so far as he could see, to better the lot of suffering man or to enrich literature. As reformer and as poet he was wholly ineffectual. That he no longer greatly cared to live is apparent, proof that his domestic happiness was not so great as to compensate for other loss. How else can the lines in *Adonais* be read:

... and what still is dear

Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither?

What precisely these imply cannot be known, but the inference of

an unhappy marriage is clear. Mary Shelley was incompetent to the part for which she had been cast by Destiny.

Clare Clairmont becomes one of his chief correspondents in 1821-1822, his letters to her conveying an ever-tender kindness born of mingled pity and affection. That she was in love with him is likely and his solicitude for her due partly to that fact. He was one to feel that love conferred upon its recipient an obligation even though it could not be returned in kind. Mary Shelley at an earlier time had been glad to get Clare from under her roof, being fearful of her designs. Of these she could not now reasonably be afraid. Nevertheless Clare's presence for a while in the household during the Italian years must have been one cause of the domestic unhappiness at which Shelley hints in several poems. From the autumn of 1820 on Clare lived mostly in Florence where for a time she held a position as a governess. She was preparing herself, by the study of German, to take a position as companion or governess in Germany, and Shelley's comments upon German affairs are due to that fact. He writes, February 18, 1821: "I hope you will find Germany and the Germans answer your expectations. I have had no opportunity of forming an idea of them—their Philosophy, as far as I can understand it, contemplates only the silver side of the shield of truth; better in this respect than the French, who only saw the narrow edge of it." It would be interesting to know whether the allusion is to Kant, whose philosophy, deriving partly from neo-Platonism, has resemblances to his own. A request to Horace Smith later in the year for a French translation of Kant suggests that he had previously attempted that obscure stylist in his native tongue and been baffled.

On February 22 he writes Charles Ollier asking the reception accorded several of his later poems. His reason is interesting: "I doubt about 'Charles the First'; but, if I do write it, it shall be the birth of severe and high feelings. You are very welcome to it, on the terms you mention, and, when once I see and feel that I can write it, it is already written. My thoughts aspire to a production of a far higher character; but the execution of it will require some years. I write what I write chiefly to inquire, by the reception which my writings meet with, how far I am fit for so great a task, or not. And I am afraid that your account will not present me with a very flattering result in this particular." What the work was which he projected is not known. Certainly no account that Ollier might give of the reception of his poems could encourage him in its pursuit. The books which he asks Ollier to send are characteristically various: "The most

copious and correct history of the discoveries of Geology. If one publication does not appear to contain what I require, send me two or three. A history of the late war in Spain; I think one has been written by Southey. Major *Somebody's* account of the siege of Zaragosa; it is a little pamphlet. Burnet's 'History of his Own Times,' and the 'Old English Drama,' 3 vols." The last two are no doubt for his play of Charles I.

On March 20 he sent Ollier the *Defence of Poetry* and the next day wrote Peacock of what he had done: "I dispatch by this post the first part of an essay, intended to consist of three parts, which I design for an antidote to your 'Four Ages of Poetry.' You will see that I have taken a more general view of what is poetry than you have, and will perhaps agree with several of my positions, without considering your own touched." He expresses his impatience with much current verse: "Procter's verses enrage me." For his private reading he would prefer "political, geological, and moral treatises." He tells too of an interesting acquaintance, the Greek Prince Mavrocordato, then in exile, who is reading the ancient Greek tragedies with Mary. It is but two weeks later, April 2, that Mary writes Clare: "Greece has declared its freedom! Prince Mavrocordato has made us expect this event for some weeks past." All Greece was in revolt and, "The worst part of this news to us is that our amiable prince will leave us—he will of course join his countrymen as soon as possible—never did man appear so happy—yet he sacrifices family—fortune—everything to the hope of freeing his country." Mary Shelley in her rejoicing in Greece's revolt was a sharer of Shelley's enthusiasm. It was the event which gave him the most happiness in his last year. For the shadow of the end was already upon him. On April 29 he wrote to Clare in words curiously prophetic: "I think I have been better altogether this winter; I wish to think so, in spite of the strong motives which should impel me to desire to exist under another form. I have bought a boat, which Williams overturned the first evening by taking hold of the top of the mast."

To an unknown correspondent, a woman, in an undated letter he advises the mastery of Greek and of Italian and German if she is to know the true character of Homer, or Petrarch, or Goethe. The letter has interest only as showing a change from an earlier belief that the mastery of Greek did not repay the effort. He writes now in a different strain: "What is a translation of Homer into English? A person who is ignorant of Greek need only look at 'Paradise Lost,' or the tragedy of 'Lear' translated into French, to obtain an analogical



conception of its worthless and miserable inadequacy. Tacitus, or Livius, or Herodotus, are equally undelightful and uninstructional in translation." The writers whom he lists in Italian and German suggest his acquaintance with the best of those literatures. Study was his avocation. But it does not suffice. He writes to Clare, June 8: "Reading does not occupy me enough: the only relief I find springs from the composition of poetry, which necessitates contemplations that lift me above the stormy mist of sensations which are my habitual place of abode." He was then writing *Adonais* and there are allusions elsewhere which suggest that he had in mind a poem called "The Creator" of which nothing is known. Clearly his ideas about persisting with poetry are variable, depending upon his health and his moods. Variable, too, are his judgments of people, for in the letter to Clare is a comment on Prince Mavrocordato which comes as a surprise and whose cause is unexplained: "A vessel has arrived to take the Greek Prince and his suite to join the army in Morea. He is a great loss to Mary and *therefore* to me...but not otherwise."

The one poem of Shelley's to attain considerable popularity in his lifetime was *Queen Mab*. A pirated version was published in the spring of 1821. Shelley applied for an injunction which, Ingpen writes, "was refused on the ground that 'the work being calculated to do injury to society had ceased to be the property of its author.'" Shelley writing to Ollier, June 11, declares, "I have not seen it for some years, but inasmuch as I recollect it is villainous trash; and I dare say much better fitted to injure than to serve the cause which it advocates. In the name of poetry, and as you are a bookseller (you observe the strength of these conjurations) pray give all manner of publicity to my disapprobation of this publication; in fact protest for me in an advertisement in the strongest terms." That an injunction would be granted he realized as improbable. The law had as little tenderness for the rights of radical authors as the conservative Reviews for their sensibilities. Shelley writes, "I hear that the abuse against me exceeds all bounds. Pray, if you see any one article particularly outrageous, send it me. As yet I have laughed; but woe to these scoundrels if they should once make me lose my temper." And to Gisborne he writes, of *Queen Mab*: "A droll circumstance has occurred. 'Queen Mab,' a poem written by me when very young, in the most furious style, with long notes against Jesus Christ, and God the Father, and the King, and bishops, and marriage, and the devil knows what, is just published by one of the low booksellers in the Strand.... You may imagine how much I am amused. For the sake

of a dignified appearance, however, and really because I wish to protest against all the bad poetry in it, I have given orders to say that it is all done against my desire....” For this reprinting, which was against his wish, the government papers heaped upon him, in the words of Horace Smith, “diabolical calumnies... which religion alone could inspire.”

As a means to the public repudiation of *Queen Mab* Shelley addressed a letter to the editor of *The Examiner* of which one passage may be cited: “I have not seen this production for several years; I doubt not but that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature. I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression; and I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity, as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the cause of freedom.” Posterity does not think so hardly of *Queen Mab* as did its author but it is easy to see his point of view. There is a vast deal of rhetoric in it and little of the magic with which his later verse is filled. That magic was perceived by few in his lifetime. The Gisbornes praised his *Adonais* and his response to their appreciation shows how unaccustomed he was to it: “I am fully repaid for the painful emotions from which some verses of my poem sprang, by your sympathy and approbation—which is all the reward I expect—and as much as I desire. It is not for me to judge whether, in the high praise your feelings assign me, you are right or wrong. The poet and the man are two different natures; though they exist together, they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding on each other’s powers and efforts by any reflex act. The decision of the cause, whether or no *I* am a poet, is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be ‘Guilty—death!’”

In August of 1821 occurred the famous Hoppner episode which cast so dark a shadow on Byron’s integrity. Shelley on a visit to Byron in Ravenna learned of the slander which the Hoppners, friends of Byron and of the Shelleys, had believed on the lying testimony of Elise, a discharged servant of the Shelleys and her rascally husband Paolo. This is Shelley’s statement in a letter to Mary: “Lord Byron has also told me of a circumstance that shocks me exceedingly; because it exhibits a degree of desperate and wicked malice for which I am at a loss to account.... It seems that *Elise*, actuated either by

some inconceivable malice for our dismissing her, or bribed by my enemies, or making common cause with her infamous husband, has persuaded the Hoppners of a story so monstrous and incredible that they must have been prone to believe any evil to have believed such assertions upon such evidence. Mr. Hoppner wrote to Lord Byron to state this story as the reason why he declined any further communications with us, and why he advised him to do the same. Elise says that Claire was my mistress; that is very well, and so far there is nothing new; all the world has heard so much, and people may believe or not believe as they think good. She then proceeds to say that Claire is with child by me; that I gave her the most violent medicine to produce abortion; that this not succeeding she was brought to bed, and that I immediately tore the child from her and sent it to the Foundling Hospital. I quote Mr. Hoppner's words—and this is stated to have taken place in the winter after we left Este. In addition, she says that both I and Claire treated *you* in the most shameful manner, that I neglected and beat you, and that Claire never let a day pass without offering you insults of the most violent kind, in which she was abetted by me. As to what Reviews and the world says, I do not care a jot, but when persons who have known me are capable of conceiving me—not that I have fallen into a great error, as would have been the living with Claire as my mistress—but that I have committed such unutterable crimes as destroying or abandoning a child, and that my own! Imagine my despair of good, imagine how it is possible that one of so weak and sensitive a nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men. *You* should write to the Hoppners a letter refuting the charge, in case you believe, and know, and can prove that it is false; stating the grounds and proofs of your belief."

This letter Mary Shelley wrote and Shelley entrusted to Byron to deliver. It was discovered among his papers after his death, and inasmuch as the breach between the Hoppners and the Shelleys was never closed it is assumed that Byron, after reading the letter, never delivered it, the reason being that he had previously believed the calumny and could not now, to Hoppner, confess his error. Byron's apologists have done their best to explain the incident away, to find some loophole to exonerate him from a crime so black, but on the face of the evidence Dowden's judgment still stands: "It remains with us, however, to effect Mary's purpose in a larger sense than she had conceived, and to witness against the baseness of the man who thought to spare his own vanity at the cost of the honour of his

friend." Byron's conduct is explained, though not justified, not only by his vanity but also by his hatred of Clare to whom his attitude was always harsh and unfeeling. To believe in her depravity was to exonerate himself in his own eyes of cruelty in depriving her of the sight of their child. Byron's psychology is so naïve as to baffle any but the simplest mind. The critic forever seeks a nonexistent subtlety in acts which are those of a childish egotist.

Back of the Hoppner episode lies, I believe, a shadow of reality in the domestic relations of the Shelleys. Elise, the maid, when later confronted by Clare denied absolutely having calumniated either the Shelleys or Clare and wrote in a letter for Mrs. Hoppner that she had never seen in Clare's conduct anything to justify criticism. Nevertheless scandalous gossip had been spread and though magnified out of all recognition may very well have been based upon the relations which existed between Mary and Clare. That these were, at the best, strained, is clear from a letter of Shelley's to Clare, June 19. "I am trying to persuade Mary to ask your pardon; I hope that I shall succeed.—In the meantime, as you were in the wrong you had better not ask hers, for that is unnecessary; but write to her—if you had been in the right you would have done so." This is rather an enigmatic passage which implies, surely, great intimacy and understanding. It is as though Shelley were to say, "Be patient with Mary; we both understand how trying she is." No doubt she was and with some provocation in a step-sister in love with her husband and not too scrupulous to take him if he permitted. Shelley's rôle I think was that of the patient friend not unflattered by Clare's devotion but pleasantly and persistently keeping it on a sisterly basis. In some of his letters to her he is responding evidently to accusations of indifference or coldness. It was probably a trying job to keep friends with Clare and at the same time placate Mary. If in his late letters and the poems of the last two years he suggests that his domestic life was more a burden than a joy there is justification in the trying situation in which he found himself. Nor is the sentence already quoted in his letter to Mary without suggestions of a domestic situation not wholly satisfactory: "*You* should write to the Hoppners a letter refuting the charge, in case you believe, and know, and can prove that it is false." It implies in him, does it not, some doubt of her and her love for and faith in him?

Yet it would be a mistake, I believe, to exaggerate the domestic infelicity of the Shelleys, which was probably no more than that usually found in an imperfect world. His letters to her are affectionate,

and if, as the poems intimate, he dreamed of a more perfect union, his sense of the actual, the sobering second thought which duly preserved him from too long flights into the world of fantasy, reconciled him to his tepid domesticity. Perhaps to say that he was resigned, rather than reconciled, would be more accurate. But the distaste for life which he expresses so often in his letters did not chiefly arise from an unhappy marriage. Rather, his marriage was not so happy as to provide for him refuge from the world. His letter to Mary of August 9, 1821, intimates their relationship justly. He addresses her as "My Dearest Mary" and resumes the discussion of the Hoppner slander, saying in part: "I dare say the subject of the latter half of my letter gave you pain, but it was necessary to look the affair in the face, and the only satisfactory answer to the calumny must be given by you, and could be given by you alone.... A certain degree and a certain kind of infamy is to be borne, and, in fact, is the best compliment which an exalted nature can receive from the filthy world, of which it is its hell to be a part; but this sort of thing exceeds the measure; and even if it were only for the sake of our dear Percy, I would take some pains to suppress it. In fact, it shall be suppressed, even if I am driven to the disagreeable necessity of prosecuting Elise before the Tuscan tribunals." Thereupon he proceeds at some length to discuss the architectural glories of Ravenna. It is a long letter which is continued the day following with news of Lord Byron and one passage of a more personal character: "How is my little darling? And how are you, and how do you get on with your book? Be severe in your corrections, and expect severity from me, your sincere admirer. . . . Is Claire with you, or is she coming?" If not ardent, it is, at least, a friendly letter.

It is in this same letter that Shelley gives his well-known description of Byron's way of life and pays more than generous acknowledgment to his genius: "L. B. gets up at two, breakfasts; we talk, read, etc. until six; then we ride, and dine at eight; and after dinner sit talking till four or five in the morning. . . . L. B. is greatly improved in every respect. In genius, in temper, in moral views, in health, in happiness. The connexion with la Guiccioli has been an inestimable benefit to him. . . . He has had mischievous passions, but these he seems to have subdued, and he is becoming what he should be, a virtuous man." Shelley then relates that at Byron's request he has written la Guiccioli to persuade her not to go to Switzerland, "an odd thing enough for an utter stranger to write on subjects of the utmost delicacy to his friend's mistress. But it seems destined that I am always

to have some active part in everybody's affairs whom I approach." The praise which Shelley bestows on Byron's work is generous, his remarks on his character friendly but discerning: "He has read to me one of the unpublished cantos of *Don Juan*, which is astonishingly fine. It sets him not only above, but far above, all the poets of the day—every word is stamped with immortality. I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending. This canto is in the style, but totally, and sustained with incredible ease and power, like the end of the second canto. There is not a word which the most rigid asserter of the dignity of human nature would desire to be cancelled. It fulfils, in a certain degree, what I have long preached of producing—something wholly new and relative to the age, and yet surpassingly beautiful. It may be vanity, but I think I see the trace of my earnest exhortations to him to create something wholly new.... Lord Byron and I are excellent friends, and were I reduced to poverty, or were I a writer who had no claims to a higher station than I possess—or did I possess a higher than I deserve, we should appear in all things as such, and I would freely ask him any favour. Such is not the case. The demon of mistrust and pride lurks between two persons in our situation, poisoning the freedom of our intercourse. This is a tax, and a heavy one, which we must pay for being human. I think the fault is not on my side, nor is it likely, I being the weaker. I hope that in the next world these things will be better managed. What is passing in the heart of another, rarely escapes the observation of one who is a strict anatomist of his own." Happily for him Shelley's perception of character was not so acute as he thought and he was spared, for the time at least, the revelation of Byron's treachery to him in the Hoppner case.

A letter to Peacock of the same date repeats the praise of *Don Juan* and expatiates on Byron's manner of life: "After breakfast we sit talking till six. From six till eight we gallop through the pine forests which divide Ravenna from the sea; we then come home and dine, and sit up gossiping till six in the morning. I don't suppose this will kill me in a week or fortnight, but I shall not try it longer. Lord B's establishment consists, besides servants, of ten horses, eight enormous dogs, three monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow, and a falcon; and all these, except the horses, walk about the house, which every now and then resounds with their unarbitrated quarrels, as if they were the masters of it." Of himself he states, "I write nothing, and probably shall write no more. It offends me to see my name classed among those who have no name. If I cannot be something better, I had rather

be nothing, and the accursed cause to the downfall of which I dedicate what powers I may have had—flourishes like a cedar and covers England with its boughs. My motive was never the infirm desire of fame; and if I should continue an author, I feel that I should desire it. This cup is justly given to one only of an age; indeed, participation would make it worthless: and unfortunate they who seek it and find it not." And he adds as a postscript: "After I have sealed my letter, I find that my enumeration of the animals in this Circean Palace was defective, and that in a material point. I have just met on the grand staircase five peacocks, two guinea hens, and an Egyptian crane. I wonder who all these animals were before they were changed into these shapes."

A letter to Mary, August 14, thanking her for the gift of her picture, is in a more ardent vein than usual. In a letter three days previously he had addressed her as "My Dear Mary"; now he addresses her as "My Dearest Love." Of her picture he writes: "I will wear, for your sake, upon my heart this image which is ever present to my mind." And he signs himself "Your faithful and affectionate S." The day following he writes graphically of a visit to Allegra in her convent. The beautiful child, wild, vivacious, vain, lives for a moment—in this page of a letter. Shelley remarked that "she is much paler, probably from the effect of improper food." In less than a year she was to die. As to her convent education he remarks, "Her intellect is not much cultivated. She knows certain *orazioni* by heart, and talks and dreams of *Paradiso* and all sorts of things, and has a prodigious list of saints, and is always talking of the Bambino. This will do her no harm, but the idea of bringing up so sweet a creature in the midst of such trash till sixteen!"

To Mary, August 16, Shelley acknowledges the receipt of her letter for Mrs. Hoppner. The passage must be quoted in its entirety, for if my inference is correct it puts Byron in even a blacker rôle than he has been credited with: "I have received your letter with that of Mrs. Hoppner. I do not wonder, my dearest friend, that you should have been moved. I was at first, but speedily regained the indifference which the opinion of anything, or anybody, except our own consciousness, amply merits; and day by day shall more receive from me. I have not recopied your letter; such a measure would destroy its authenticity, but have given it to Lord Byron, who has engaged to send it with his own comments to the Hoppners. People do not hesitate, it seems, to make themselves panderers and accomplices to slander, for the Hoppners had exacted from Lord Byron that these

accusations should be concealed from *me*. Lord Byron is not a man to keep a secret, good or bad; but in openly confessing that he has not done so, he must observe a certain delicacy, and therefore wished to send the letter himself, and indeed this adds weight to your representations. Have you seen the article in the *Literary Gazette* on me? They evidently allude to some story of this kind—however cautious the Hoppners have been in preventing the calumniated person from asserting his justification, you know too much of the world not to be certain that this was the utmost limit of their caution. So much for nothing." The inference, I believe, is obvious that Byron's proposal was designedly made to prevent the letter reaching its destination and his own indiscretion being made known.

In the same letter he asks Mary to decide their residence for the coming winter, whether to continue in Pisa, to which Byron is coming, or go elsewhere: "Lord Byron has certainly a great regard for us—the regard of such a man is worth—*some* of the tribute we must pay to the base passions of humanity in any intercourse with those within their circle; he is better worth it than those on whom we bestow it from mere custom." He continues in a vein which reveals much of his disillusionment and pain: "My greatest content would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, would build a boat, and shut upon my retreat the floodgates of the world. I would read no reviews, and talk with no authors. If I dared trust my imagination, it would tell me that there are one or two chosen companions besides yourself whom I should desire. But to this I would not listen—where two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them. And good, far more than evil impulses, love, far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been its object, the source of all sorts of mischief. So on this plan, I would be *alone*, and would devote, either to oblivion or to future generations, the overflowings of a mind which, timely withdrawn from the contagion, should be kept fit for no baser object. But this it does not appear that we shall do. . . . The calumnies, the source of which are probably deeper than we perceive, have ultimately, for object, the depriving us of the means of security and subsistence. You will easily perceive the gradations by which calumny proceeds to pretext, pretext to persecution, and persecution to the ban of fire and water. It is for this, and not because this or that fool, or the whole court of fools, curse and rail, that calumny is worth refuting or chastising."

He writes to Medwin, August 22: "I am happy to hear that



'Adonais' pleased you; I was considering how I could send you a copy;—nor am I less flattered by your friend Sir John's approbation.—I think I shall write again.—Whilst you were with me, that is during the latter period, and after you went away, I was harassed by some severe disquietudes, the causes of which are now I hope almost at an end. What were the speculations which you say disturbed you? My mind is at peace respecting nothing so much as the constitution and mysteries of the great system of things;—my curiosity on the point never amounts to solicitude." The words may possibly be interpreted in two ways, either as expressing the hopelessness of understanding the "constitution of the mysteries," or as implying his acceptance of the Platonism evident in his later poems and in *A Defence of Poetry*. That his mind is at peace seems rather to mean that he has found a philosophy which satisfies him. If this is true it can be discovered from an examination of *Prometheus*, *The Witch of Atlas*, *Adonais*, *Hellas*, and *A Defence of Poetry*. The consistency of the ideas set forth in all these works serves to strengthen the inference.

On August 26 Shelley wrote to Hunt proposing the publication, later christened *The Liberal*, of which Hunt, Byron, and Shelley were to be the proprietors and chief contributors. Shelley defines his own part in the enterprise with care: "As for myself, I am, for the present, only a sort of link between you and him, until you can know each other, and effectuate the arrangements; since (to entrust you with a secret which, for your sake, I withhold from Lord Byron) nothing would induce me to share in the profits, and still less, in the borrowed splendour of such a partnership. You and he, in different manners, would be equal, and would bring, in a different manner, but in the same proportion, equal stock of reputation and success. Do not let my frankness with you, nor my belief that you deserve it more than Lord Byron, have the effect of deterring you from assuming a station in modern literature, which the universal voice of my contemporaries forbids me either to stoop to or to aspire to. I am, and I desire to be, nothing." He adds that he will not ask Byron for the money for Hunt's passage to Italy, "because there are men, however excellent, from whom we would never receive an obligation, in the worldly sense of the word; and I am as jealous for my friend as for myself." Not having the money himself, Shelley proposes to borrow it of Horace Smith. His reading of Byron's character, is, as usual, discerning. Save with the Hoppner letter, Shelley seems never to have trusted Byron, much as he admired his genius.

The last of Shelley's works published during his lifetime, *Hellas*, is mentioned in a letter of October 22 to Gisborne: "I am just finishing a dramatic poem, called 'Hellas', upon the contest now raging in Greece—a sort of imitation of the 'Persae' of Aeschylus, full of lyrical poetry. I try to be what I might have been, but am not successful." The poem was published by Ollier in 1822. The letter reveals his absorption both in Greek affairs and Greek literature: "I read the Greek dramatists and Plato for ever. You are right about Antigone, how sublime a picture of a woman! and what think you of the choruses, and especially the lyrical complaints of the godlike victim? and the menaces of Tiresias, and their rapid fulfilment? Some of us have, in a prior existence, been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie." *Hellas* he sent to Ollier, November 11, with a request for immediate publication. He remarks, incidentally, "I am especially curious to hear the fate of 'Adonais.' I confess I should be surprised if *that* poem were born to an immortality of oblivion."

In his Preface to *Hellas* Shelley describes the work as a "mere improvise" arising from the author's "intense sympathy... with the cause he would celebrate." He then pays tribute to the ancient Greeks whose inheritors we are: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece... The human form and the human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race." But despite the immense debt which the modern world owes to ancient Greece, the rulers are apathetic to the cause of Greek liberty. The English support the Turkish tyrants and the Russians desire to possess Greece for themselves: "Should the English people ever become free, they will reflect upon the part which those who presume to represent their will have played in the great drama of the revival of liberty, with feelings which it would become them to anticipate. This is the age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressors, and every one of those ringleaders of the privileged gangs of murderers and swindlers, called sovereigns, look to each other for aid against the common enemy... Of this holy alliance all the despots of the earth are virtual members... Well do these destroyers of mankind know their enemy, when they impute the insurrection in Greece to the same spirit before which they tremble throughout the

rest of Europe." Shelley would have rejoiced, had he lived, in the partial failure of his prophecy. England eventually took the part of Greece, whether for the political reasons which Shelley asserted would be the course of wisdom, to maintain Greece against both Turkey and Russia, or from higher motives, and at Navarino destroyed the Turkish sea power.

The Prologue, though a fragment, contains passages of the greatest importance as expressing Shelley's theological and metaphysical ideas. The scene is the "roofless senate house, whose floor is Chaos." Here before the invisible One, or God, appear Christ, Satan, and Mahomet, contending for dominion over Greece. To the assemblage before the throne of God are summoned "hierarchs and kings"—

Who from your thrones pinnacled on the past  
Sway the reluctant present, ye who sit  
Pavilioned on the radiance or the gloom  
Of mortal thought, which like an exhalation  
Steaming from earth conceals the                      of heaven  
Which give it birth.

We could wish to know the omitted word. Nevertheless the meaning is clear. The kings I take to be "those kings of old philosophy," of whom Shelley elsewhere speaks, rather than those earthly rulers for whom he had little use. They are the rulers of thought who await the decree which is to determine the fate of earth which is "en-wrapped"—

Less in the beauty of its tender light  
Than in an atmosphere of living spirit

which—

Impels the generations  
To their appointed place.

The thought is obscured by lacunae in the lines but by reason of its similarity to a philosophy which Shelley has elsewhere expressed may be safely guessed. Earth and the minds of men dwell, as in a liquid medium of ether, in an enveloping realm of thought or spirit ruled by the mighty minds of the past, to whom, as the exhalation of an offering ascend the thoughts of mankind. Thought, spirit, are the realities of the dependent world which is "the shadow of God."

Thought and its power are the theme of subsequent lines. It was on an "antique region" that "in the world's golden dawn" there "fell

the dews of thought." Greece is meant, and from thought grew her greatness. When "the winter of its glory came"

The winds that stripped it bare blew on, and swept  
That dew into the utmost wildernesses  
In wandering clouds of sunny rain that thawed  
The unmaternal bosom of the North.

The meaning is evident. The "dews of thought," a figure which Shelley elsewhere employs as symbolical of the intellectually divine, fertilize the sterile North, the uncultured countries of Western Europe. The divine decree remains to be uttered. The "sons of God" assemble—

To speed, or to prevent, or to suspend.

The idea suggested is that the decrees of the One are determined by those who rule the realm of thought, that they in their summation constitute the second hypostasis of the One, the intellect of Deity, and that before them, therefore, is argued the case of Greek survival or destruction. The Chorus describes the assembling of the Powers "gloomy or bright" who constitute the senate of God. The imagery employed, as in—

A chaos of light and motion  
Upon that glassy ocean

is similar to that employed in *Prometheus*. The universal mind is likened to the ocean, symbol of unity, but it is animated by individual minds. The figure is one variously encountered in Shelley, that of multiplicity in unity.

Before the invisible One, the Father of all things, Christ kneels and in terms of familiar Platonism asks that Fate, child of God, be sent to free Greece from tyranny and enable her to arise victorious. The passage employs the metaphors of the dew and the rain as symbolical of super-terrestrial influences upon human destiny, figures familiar in Shelley's usage. Familiar likewise is the statement that Christ fulfils the promise of the Divine love and unity as taught by the Platonic philosophy:

...by Plato's sacred light,  
Of which my spirit was a burning morrow—  
By Greece and all she cannot cease to be,  
Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth.

## 386      Greek Arts Shadow Divine Reality

Also Platonic are the lines—

... her harmonies and forms,  
Echoes and shadows of what Love adores  
In thee...

The arts of Greece shadow forth the Divine Reality existing in the One and perceptible to mortal vision through Love. It is an idea familiar to Platonism and neo-Platonism, though more stressed in the latter.

Satan interrupts the plea of Christ with words of mockery. The "innumerable worlds of golden light" visible through the crystal floor of heaven he claims as his empire. He asks if Christ would rekindle the strife—

Which our great Father then did arbitrate  
When he assigned to his competing sons  
Each his apportioned realm?

The implied philosophy is Manicheistic seemingly. Good and evil, existing alike in the One and reconcilable only in it, have each their appointed realm. Satan asks that Destiny, "viceregent of my will, no less than of the Father's" be sent with "the winged hounds, Famine and Pestilence," with Superstition, War, Fraud, and Anarchy to trample the spirit of liberty before glory, science, and security, which hang on Freedom "like fruit on the green tree," may ripen. To which plea Christ answers that the "obdurate spirit," Satan, "seest but the Past in the To-come." The worlds whose dominion Satan boasts are no more than—

... furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops  
Before the Power that wields and kindles them.  
True greatness asks not space, true excellence  
Lives in the Spirit of all things that live,  
Which lends it to the worlds thou callest thine.

Upon which utterance Mahomet demands that he be accorded the favor of God and that God's word, triumphant through Destiny, be

... a curse on them whose creed  
Divides and multiplies the most high God.

The curse is invoked on the trinitarian concept of Deity, whose Christian derivation is from the Platonic conception of the One and its three hypostases; or upon the philosophy of Manicheism.

## Can Freedom Triumph in Greece? 387

The poem, after its prologue, opens lyrically with Mahmud sleeping, an Indian Slave invoking peace upon his slumbers, and a chorus of Greek captive women recalling the glories of liberty, which, heaven-born, cannot die. The chorus tells of the light of Freedom touching Greece, Florence, England, and Switzerland, of the night which followed, of Freedom rising again like the sun to shine on America. France with all the blood of her revolution could not quench the light, and now Germany and Spain respond to it. To Greece, also, Freedom returns:

Her renovated nurslings play  
And in the naked lightnings  
Of truth they purge their dazzled eyes.  
Let freedom leave, where'er she flies,  
A desert, or a paradise;  
Let the beautiful and the brave  
Share her glory, or a grave.

The emphasis in the lyrics, as subsequently in the poem, is upon the doubt that Freedom can triumph in Greece. Even so it is better to die in the battle for Freedom than to live as slaves:

Dust let her glories be;  
And a name and a nation  
Be forgotten, Freedom, with thee!

Mahmud awakes from evil dreams apprehending treason and defeat. He asks Hassan to summon—

A Jew, whose spirit is a chronicle  
Of strange and secret and forgotten things

to interpret to him the “gloomy vision” which has thrice haunted him. Hassan describes the aged Jew, Ahasuerus, from whose eye looks forth—

A life of unconsumèd thought which pierces  
The present, and the past, and the to-come.

The command, Hassan assures Mahmud, is “even now made known to him” in his inaccessible sea-cavern whose approach Hassan describes. Mahmud orders that his mutinous troops be silenced and Hassan departs on the errand. There ensues the lyrical chorus which begins—

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever  
From creation to decay.

## 388      The Unceasing Flux of Creation

It is a lyric of great interest for its Platonism and for its theology. It demands, therefore, a brief analysis.

The worlds which "are rolling ever from creation to decay" symbolize the unceasing flux of creation. Is it they who are immortal or the human spirits which shuttle back and forth "through birth's orient portal and death's dark chasm"?

New shapes they still may weave,  
New gods, new laws receive.

Their activities seem more appropriate to spirits than to the rolling worlds. Perhaps the thought is that amid the flux of worlds the immortal spirits pass perpetually from life to death and death to life, incessantly creative, shaping the forms of things. The following stanza speaks of a "Promethean conqueror" who "trod the thorns of death and shame," Christ clearly, after whose return to the world of the divine, Hell, Sin and Slavery preyed upon the world of men:

The moon of Mahomet  
Arose, and it shall set;  
While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon  
The cross leads generations on.

It is hard to say whether this prophecy is spoken in regret or triumph, for in the next stanza it is told that "Apollo, Pan, and Love, and even Olympian Jove grew weak" in the light of "killing Truth" and all the "Powers of earth and air, fled from the folding star of Bethlehem." We may judge from what Shelley elsewhere writes that this death of paganism, due to Christianity, is a loss to mankind. These deities, dispossessed, wail for the vanished "golden years."

The Janizars are clamoring for their pay. Mahmud bids them "pay themselves with Christian blood."

... Go! Bid them kill;  
Blood is the seed of gold.

But blood does not suffice and Mahmud commands that the "treasures of victorious Solyman" which were "stored for a day of ruin" be opened and used to pay the mutinous troops. Mahmud is prophetic of impending ruin, but Hassan attempts to comfort him with a description of the rising might of Islam, which will quell insurrection. Mahmud is not convinced, for he feels that the spirit of freedom is abroad. The Greeks slaughtered in the battle which Hassan describes

die breathing defiance and prophecy of destruction to the victor, which in the naval battle is witnessed in the defeat of the Turks. Messengers arrive announcing the departure of the Russian ambassador, the capture by the Greeks of many cities with the slaughter of the Islamites therein, and the revolt of Christian and of tributary tribes. All the auguries are ominous of change and destruction; the plague is abroad. All reports and all omens presage ruin. To this scene and to the interpretation of these events comes Ahasuerus the Jew.

Chorus and semichorus chant the praise of Liberty. Yet though Athens arose she also was destroyed:

Athens arose!—Around her born,  
Shone like mountains in the morn  
Glorious states:—and are they now  
Ashes, wrecks, oblivion?

A semichorus replies that though temples, towers, citadels, and marts decay,

...Greece and her foundations are  
Built below the tide of war,  
Based on the crystalline sea  
Of thought and its eternity.

The figure of the "crystalline sea of thought" is one previously employed in the poem as also in *Prometheus*. Clearly it is important in Shelley's philosophy. Through it float the "thoughts of man's own mind." It is the "liquid lair" of the chorus of prophetic spirits who comfort Prometheus. The likeness of this universe of thought is to the circumambient ether. Man derives inspiration from it and his thought contributes to it. It is characterized as the crystal floor of heaven. In it the forms of matter, shaped by it, are perpetually destroyed and renewed. It is this sea of thought which alone has enduring reality. Greece, like heaven, is based on this "crystalline sea" and therefore eternally endures, not as a physical entity but as a body of ideas. It is these ideas whereby—

Her citizens, imperial spirits,  
Rule the present from the past;  
On all this world of men inherits  
Their seal is set.

The ideas of Greece endure, but a semichorus prophesies destruction and—



## Thought Is the Sole Reality

The shrieks as of a people calling  
 "Mercy! Mercy!"

To which a semichorus replies:

In sacred Athens, near the fane  
 Of Wisdom, Pity's altar stood;  
 Serve not the unknown God in vain,  
 But pay that broken shrine again  
 Love for hate, and tears for blood.

Mahmud in the presence of Ahasuerus fears his disdain; to which  
 fear the Jew replies:

Disdain thee?—not the worm beneath thy feet!  
 The Fathomless has care for meaner things  
 Than thou canst dream. . . .

He bids Mahmud think no more of past, present, or future but look  
 only on the One, "the unborn and the undying." All the wonders of  
 the constellated universe—

...—this Whole  
 Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,  
 With all the silent or tempestuous workings  
 By which they have been, are, or cease to be,  
 Is but a vision; all that it inherits  
 Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles, and dreams;  
 Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less  
 The future and the past are idle shadows  
 Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being;  
 Nought is but that which feels itself to be.

The philosophy expressed is explicitly Platonic and Berkeleyan.  
 Thought is the sole reality and the sum of all thought is the One,  
 or God, in whom exist the objects of all thought and the thoughts of  
 lesser and constituent minds. Shelley is playing with his favourite  
 theme, the multiplicity of unity, though the stress, in the lines quoted,  
 is upon unity.

Mahmud feels "doubt, insecurity, astonishment" at the words  
 of Ahasuerus, who proceeds to a further exposition:

Mistake me not! All is contained in each.  
 Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup  
 Is that which has been or will be, to that

Which is—the absent to the present. Thought  
 Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,  
 Reason, Imagination, cannot die;  
 They are what that which they regard appears,  
 The stuff whence mutability can weave  
 All that it hath dominion o'er—worlds, worms,  
 Empires and superstitions. What has thought  
 To do with time, or place, or circumstance?  
 Wouldst thou behold the future?—ask and have!  
 Knock and it shall be opened—look, and lo!  
 The coming age is shadowed on the past  
 As on a glass.

Thought, then, and its “quick elements” are the sole reality and create the mutable universe, which is made and unmade as thought decrees. In the eternal creative processes of thought the present is but the link between past and future. Shelley seems to say that the process of thought creation is coherent, logical, and therefore explicable; that which has been and is determines what shall be. Therefore knowledge of the future lies in the correct reading of the past.

Mahmud recalls his cryptic vision, a vision of Mahomet directing a torrent of men at a breach in the walls of Stamboul. Ahasuerus declares:

What thou seest  
 Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream;  
 A dream itself, yet less, perhaps, than that  
 Thou calls't reality.

He bids Mahmud perceive the mutability of earthly things:

... The Past  
 Now stands before thee like an Incarnation  
 Of the To-come; yet wouldst thou commune with  
 That portion of thyself which was ere thou  
 Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death,  
 Dissolve with that strong faith and fervent passion,  
 Which called it from the uncreated deep,  
 Yon cloud of war with its tempestuous phantoms  
 Of raging death; and draw with mighty will  
 The imperial shade hither.

The device employed is that used in *Prometheus* when the Phantasm of Jupiter is summoned to repeat the curse passed upon him by Pro-

metheus. The belief which underlies the device is the same, also, the neo-Platonic and Theosophic belief in the imperishable mind whose existence lies in the divine thought and which incarnates itself in the vehicle of an earthly form whilst still retaining its connection with the Divine, wherein persists its phantom to which it returns after death. There are in neo-Platonic speculation, confusingly enough, several of these vehicles, and Theosophy postulates physical, astral, and mental bodies all coexistent, and all but the mental body perishable. The phantom summoned by Mahmud is either this imperishable body which awaits him or, as seems more probable from the context and from the analogy in *Prometheus*, the form which awaits him in the underworld of death, which is also impermanent.

The phantom has, at any rate, prophetic power. The glory of Islam is past:

A later empire nods in its decay;  
The autumn of a greener faith is come.

An empire waits Mahmud in the underworld, an empty throne—

...and for thy subjects thou,  
Like us, shall rule the ghosts of murdered life,

. . . . .  
Islam must fall, but we will reign together  
Over its ruins in the world of death.

Mahmud demands the hour of destruction and the Phantom replies ambiguously. Voices from without cry victory and Mahmud, still with the weight of his vision upon him, declares it is but "weak lightning before darkness." The voice without tells of Islam's victory and the destruction of the Greeks. Austria, Russia, England, and France demand peace which "means death when Monarchs speak." Chains and tortures are prepared for the captive Greeks. It is apparent that Shelley felt that the immediate revolution would fail, that the European powers, either actively or passively, would aid the Turks in putting down the revolt. But this is not the conclusion of the poem. The semichoruses announce the ultimate victory, the triumph of freedom over tyranny at some distant time and, seemingly, in some other world, "in a diviner clime." Liberty, Virtue, and Love, defeated on earth, yet ultimately triumph because they endure forever. It is his declaration of faith in the conquest by the good of evil, in the imperishable character of thought. The final chorus declares the coming of a better time:

The world's great age begins anew  
The golden years return.

But meanwhile—

Oh, cease! must hate and death return?  
Cease! must men kill and die?  
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn  
Of bitter prophecy.  
The world is weary of the past,  
Oh, might it die or rest at last!

As in *Prometheus* the liberation of man for which Shelley hopes lies only after unnumbered years—

Perchance no thought can count them, yet they pass.

Despondency and resignation, regret for vanished delight and unreturning hope, are the notes struck by the lyrics written in 1821 and the fragments of unfinished poems. In all, these are but a handful, but lovely in their grace and ease. Mostly they are the expression of a mood or written to celebrate an experience or addressed to a friend—occasional verse written by one who no longer seeks a public. Their unprofessional character is their charm, like the performance of the virtuoso who plays for a roomful of friends and indulges his own whim. In them is no evidence of diminished power but only the unconcern of the artist who no longer aspires to an audience. Whether the triumph of the Greek cause or the success of later revolutions, or whether some new experience in love or friendship would have stirred in him a fresh ambition it is of course impossible to say. He clung, as *Hellas* reveals, to an ultimate hope of a better world and a better life. But he knew that such a world would not be during his earthly existence if it was indeed possible in the world of men. Gone too was the hope of any great personal happiness for himself. The mood repeatedly struck is that expressed in one of the most perfect of his lyrics:

Out of the day and night  
A joy has taken flight;  
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,  
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight  
No more—Oh, never more!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *The Triumph of Life*



SHELLEY was not infallible as a literary prophet, whether of his own work or another's. His repeated failures to evoke any praise of work which he knew to be good had left him with the belief that the best products of human genius are doomed to be understood and loved only by a few. In a letter to Joseph Severn, November 29, 1821, he writes: "In spite of his transcendent genius, Keats never was, nor ever will be, a popular poet; and the total neglect and obscurity in which the astonishing remnants of his mind still lie, was hardly to be dissipated by a writer, who, however he may differ from Keats in more important qualities, at least resembles him in that accidental one, a want of popularity. I have little hope, therefore, that the poem [*Adonais*] I send you will excite any attention, nor do I feel assured that a critical notice of his writings would find a single reader. But for these considerations, it had been my intention to have collected the remnants of his compositions, and to have published them with a life and criticism." It is one of the losses to literature that Shelley did not write a critical essay on Keats. Though it is unlikely he would have wholly anticipated the modern point of view, it would have been philosophically searching and he would have made clear what still is too little understood in Keats, the strain of neo-Platonism in his work, his doctrine of esthetic salvation whose roots, though Keats was probably unaware, lie in Plotinus.

Shelley's letters to Clare Clairmont, the most numerous among those of his last months, are intriguing in that his relations to her are not certainly to be defined. They are affectionate letters, letters such as a brother might write to a beloved sister, or such as a man might write to a woman who loved him but whom he was unable to marry and perhaps did not wish to marry. Yet there are occasional sentences which imply that he held himself in check and did not write as ardently as he desired. How else is this, of December 11, to be interpreted: "I should be very glad to receive a confidential letter from you—one totally the reverse of those I write you.... Do not think that my affection and anxiety for you ever cease, or that I ever love you less although that love has been and still must be a source of disquietude to me." And at the end of the letter. after

giving the news and saying of himself that he reads but does not write and has "no spirits for serious composition," he concludes, "Tell me dearest what you mean to do, and if it should give you pleasure come and live with us." Shelley was no libertine, nor was he, I believe, dominated by sex. Yet he was attractive to women and responded quickly to affection. He believed, as he stated explicitly, that love should not be selfish and possessive. He had deserted Harriet because there was no longer love to bind them and it is evident later that he found Mary too often cold to him. Nevertheless they had much in common and their relation was usually affectionate if not ardent. Would he have accepted Clare as a mistress, and did he do so in some moment when Mary's coldness justified him in his own eyes? Without explicit evidence it is a question impossible to decide. And so, too, in the instance of Jane Williams whom he so much admired. Some of the late lyrics quite definitely imply his love for her, but whether consummated or no remains unsure. In Shelley's moral code, not convention nor legal ties would have restrained him, but only the wish to give no pain to another, especially if that other loved him.

There is again, December 31, a curious sentence in his letter to Clare: "Mary desires me to say (not that she sees this letter or any of yours addressed to me) that she would have written to you—but she has been very unwell." Yet the letter is signed "Ever most faithfully yours." The domestic life of the Shelleys is a theme for a novelist, with its conflicts of affection and jealousy. But no imaginative interpretation is likely to do justice to the situation, for the facts are too unsure. Amorally speaking, the historian of Shelley can only feel regret that both the possession of love and the lack of love brought him so little tranquillity. He would have written more had he been at peace, but whether so well, who can say? Perhaps, in the world's eyes, a few exquisite lyrics wrung from unrest and suffering are cheaply bought at the cost of transitory pain to the poet. The poems endure and the poet finds, we suppose, peace in death. Shelley, it is sure, seldom found it in life. Any moments of love he may have known, licit or otherwise, were small compensation for the pain, physical and mental, which were his lot on earth.

The last six months of his life were burdened with money difficulties, with the vicissitudes and worries of his friends, Hunt and Clare Clairmont, which he shared with his customary disinterestedness, and with the revelations of Byron's duplicity. Death intervened before any one of these had come to a crisis but the records in the

letters point the way to what would inevitably have been greater financial entanglements, incurred in behalf of his friends, further unhappiness in his human relations, and small evidence of a poetic activity which in some degree might offset these misfortunes. On January 11, 1822, he writes Peacock that books be sent him. Byron's residence near by he at this date finds a "relief . . . after the dreary solitude of the understanding and the imagination" of recent years. He writes that Byron has fitted up apartments in his palace for Hunt's expected visit. Of himself he writes that he has long been idle but is now engaged on *Charles the First*. "My health is better—my cares are lighter; and although nothing will cure the consumption of my purse, yet it drags on a sort of life in death, very like its master, and seems, like Fortunatus's, always empty yet never quite exhausted. You will have seen my 'Adonais,' and perhaps my 'Hellas,' and I think, whatever you may judge of the subject, the composition of the first poem will not wholly displease you. I wish I had something better to do than furnish this jingling food for the hunger of oblivion, called verse, but I have not."

A tart letter of the same date to the Olliers demands news of *Hellas* and *Adonais*. He announces that his historical tragedy, *Charles the First*, will be ready for publication by the spring and gives the Olliers the refusal of it. "I ought to say that the Tragedy promises to be good, as Tragedies go; and that it is not coloured by the party spirit of the author: How far it may be popular I cannot judge." To Gisborne he writes, also in January: "What think you of Lord Byron now? Space wondered less at the swift and fair creations of God, when he grew weary of vacancy, than I at this spirit of an angel in the mortal paradise of a decaying body. So I think, let the world envy while it admires, as it may." He makes in the same letter a curious comment, in view of one subsequently to be quoted, upon Jane Williams, who, he says, is "more amiable and beautiful than ever, and a sort of spirit of embodied peace in the midst of our circle of tempests. So much for first impressions!"

On January 25 he wrote both Horace Smith and Leigh Hunt. The former he asked to purchase for him a harp and send it to him at once lest "the grace of my compliment . . . be lost." Smith was requested to advance the seventy to eighty guineas required, which, as subsequently appears, he declined to do. Presumably the harp was to have been a gift to Jane Williams. Later Shelley substituted a guitar accompanied by the beautiful lyric beginning:

Ariel to Miranda:—Take

This slave of Music, for the sake  
Of him who is the slave of thee;

The proposed gift of the harp was extravagant, and the guitar better suited to his means. Shelley was lavish in his gifts to others, miserly with himself. It was an amiable weakness; yet his life would have been smoother and his troubles fewer had he mingled a little prudence with his generosity. The chronic semi-indigence in which he lived could have been avoided had he but a tincture in his nature of Byron's calculating worldliness. It can not be said that in his maturity he gave blindly but he gave recklessly without thought of the morrow. He writes to Hunt, January 25: "I send you by return of post £150,—within 30 or 40 of what I had contrived to scrape together. How I am to assemble the constituents of such a sum again I do not at present see; but do not be disheartened,—we will all put our shoulders to the wheel. . . . Past circumstances between Lord B[ Byron] and me render it *impossible* that I should accept any supply from him for my own use, or that I should ask it for yours if the contribution could be supposed in any manner to relieve me, or to do what I could otherwise have done." Of his own activities he writes in the same letter: "My faculties are shaken to atoms, and torpid. I can write nothing; and if 'Adonais' had no success, and excited no interest, what incentive can I have to write?"

Clare's frantic concern for Allegra's welfare and her desire to rescue her from the convent in which she was being reared was a continuing source of trouble both to Shelley and to Mary. Byron, who had conceived a hatred of Clare, refused to let her see Allegra or have a voice in her upbringing. Clare detested the convent training and only too justly, as the event proved, feared for the child's health. Shelley, endeavoring to comfort Clare, had done everything possible to placate Byron but was aware of the impossibility of moving him to sympathy or kindness to her. The letters of Shelley and of Mary to Clare at this time endeavor to dissuade her from rash action. Mary's of February 22 declares, "Your anxiety for A[llegra]'s health is to a great degree unfounded." Bagnacavallo, where the child is placed, is, she argues, extremely healthful. That Allegra "ought to be taken out of the hands of one as remorseless as he is unprincipled," Mary agrees. "But at the same time it appears to me that the present moment is exactly the one in which this is the most difficult—time cannot add to these difficulties, for they can never be greater." Clare apparently



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planned to abduct the child, a thing in itself very difficult to do. "At your desire Shelley urged her removal to L[ord] B[yron], and this appears in the highest degree to have exasperated him—he vowed that if you annoyed him he would place A[llegria] in some secret convent." Byron, possessed of wealth and power, "a man reckless of the ill he does others" and "obstinate to desperation in the pursuance of his plans or his revenge," is too much for Clare to cope with. If Clare abducts the child and hides, Byron will come upon Shelley and the result must inevitably be a duel. Clare's one hope is to wait until Byron is forced to go to England. "He may be reconciled with his wife, and though he may bluster, he may not be sorry to get A[llegria] off his hands." Mary adds, superstitiously, that spring is a bad time to undertake any enterprise, for all the major calamities in their lives have come to pass in that season.

Shelley continues the letter, advising Clare against setting up a school as she had proposed doing. The tone is superficially light at first but his true feeling is apparent in the concluding paragraph: "I am better to-day. I have been very ill, body and soul, but principally the latter.— I took some exercise in the boat to dissipate thought: but it over-fatigued me and made me worse. The Baths, I think, do me good, but especially solitude, and not seeing polite human faces, and hearing voices. I go over about twice a week to see Emilia, who is in better spirits and health than she has been for some time.— Danielli almost frightens her to death, and she handed him over to me to quiet and console.— It seems that I am worthy to take my degree of M.A. in the art of Love, for I have contrived to calm the despairing swain, much to the satisfaction of poor Emilia, who in that convent of hers sees everything as through a mist, ten times its natural size.— The Williams's come sometimes: they have taken Pagnano. W[illiams] I like and I have got reconciled to Jane.— Mr. Taaffe rides, writes, invites, complains, bows and apologizes: he would be a mortal bore if he came often. The Greek Prince comes sometimes, and I reproach my own savage disposition that so agreeable, accomplished and amiable a person is not more agreeable to me." The passage bespeaks his growing misanthropy, his impatience with all human kind, but even so I cannot think his remark on Jane Williams wholly ingenuous. Perhaps in a letter read both by Clare and Mary circumspection was desirable. The plague of a jealous household he had known. To avoid it a certain coolness of understatement he may well have thought justifiable.

Another letter to Clare of apparently the same period, repeats ex-

plicitly and briefly the futility of contending with Byron. His own dislike of Byron is evidently strong though the reasons, other than Byron's harshness to Clare, are not intimated: "I shall certainly take our house *far* from Lord Byron's, although it may be impossible suddenly to put an end to his detested intimacy.... Mary tells you that Lord Byron is obstinate and *awake* about Allegra. My great object has been to lull him into security until circumstances might call him to England. But the idea of contending with him in Italy, and defended by his enormous fortune, is vain. I was endeavouring to induce him to place Allegra in the institute at Lucca, but his jealousy of my regard for *your* interests will, since a conversation that I had with him the other day, render him inaccessible to my suggestions." It was, therefore, with vast reluctance that Shelley approached Byron for the money needed by Hunt for the voyage to Italy. The letter is rather formal and says in part: "I enclose you a letter from Hunt which annoys me on more than one account. You will observe the postscript, and you know me well enough to feel how painful a task is set me in commenting upon it. Hunt had urged me more than once to ask you to lend him this money. My answer consisted in sending him all I could spare, which I have now literally done. Your kindness in fitting up a part of your own house for his accommodation I sensibly felt, and willingly accepted from you on his part, but, believe me, without the slightest intention of imposing, or, if I could help it, allowing to be imposed, any heavier task on your purse. As it has come to this in spite of my exertions, I will not conceal from you the low ebb of my own money affairs in the present moment,—that is, my absolute incapacity of assisting Hunt farther. I do not think poor Hunt's promise to pay in a given time is worth very much; but mine is less subject to uncertainty, and I should be happy to be responsible for any engagement he may have proposed to you." Byron lent Hunt £200 on Shelley's bond, a business-like arrangement but scarcely to be termed generous.

To Hunt, in a letter of March 2, Shelley explains his reasons for continuing his intimacy with Byron: "The aspect of affairs has somewhat changed since the date of that in which I expressed a repugnance to a continuance of intimacy with Lord Byron, so close as that which now exists; at least, it has changed so far as regards you and the intended journal.... Particular circumstances, or rather, I should say, particular dispositions in Lord Byron's character, render the close and exclusive intimacy with him in which I find myself intolerable to me; thus much, my best friend, I will confess and con-

fide to you. No feelings of my own shall injure or interfere with what is now nearest to them—your interest, and I will take care to preserve the little influence I may have over this Proteus in whom such strange extremes are reconciled, until we meet—which we now must, at all events, soon do.” Whether his disgust of Byron was due solely to the treatment of Clare or whether Shelley had got wind of Byron’s duplicity in the Hoppner episode does not appear. But Shelley’s judgment of Byron was a considered one and cannot be brushed aside as testy or erratic. Shelley misjudged people in the enthusiasm of his first knowledge of them or in the revulsion of disillusionment, but those whom he knew long he judged truly. Peacock, Hunt, Godwin, Byron—Shelley knew them thoroughly, and his final word on them is trustworthy. The letter to Hunt includes also a statement as to Shelley’s ebbing activity as a writer. “I have written nothing for this last two months. . . . What motives have I to write? I *had* motives, and I thank the God of my own heart that they were totally different from those of the other ages of humanity who make mouths in the glass of time. But what are *those* motives now? The only inspiration of an ordinary kind I could descend to acknowledge would be the earning of £100 for you; and that it seems I cannot.”

Shelley’s letters to Clare until Allegra’s death on April 19 continue to urge caution upon her. His opinion of Byron is firmly hostile: “It is of vital importance both to me and to yourself, to Allegra even, that I should put a period to my intimacy with L[ord] B[yrone], and that without *éclat*. No sentiments of honour or justice restrain him (as I strongly suspect) from the basest insinuations, and the only mode in which I could effectually silence him I am reluctant (even if I had proof) to employ during my father’s life. But for your immediate feelings I would suddenly and irrevocably leave this country which he inhabits, nor ever enter it but as an enemy to determine our differences *without words*.” It is difficult to see in this anything other than Shelley’s belief that Byron credited the Hoppners and was slandering him. That he contemplated a duel with Byron seems to be the meaning. In another place Shelley remarks of his and Byron’s pistol practice that he was glad his skill was improving and about equal to Byron’s, a remark whose sinister implications become clear in the light of these subsequent allusions. That Shelley’s principles would have permitted him to fight a duel seems on the face of it improbable. Yet both in his letters to Hunt and to Clare his remarks on Byron breathe detestation: He writes to Hunt, April 10: “I said what I thought with regard to Lord Byron, nor would I have breathed

a syllable of my feelings in any ear but yours, but with you, I would, and I may think aloud. Perhaps time has corrected me, and I am become, like those whom I formerly condemned, misanthropical and suspicious. If so do you cure me; nor should I wonder, for if friendship is the medicine of such diseases I may well say that mine have been long neglected—and how deep the wounds have been, you partly know and partly can conjecture. Certain it is, that Lord Byron has made me bitterly feel the inferiority which the world has presumed to place between us and which subsists nowhere in reality but in our own talents, which are not our own but Nature's—or in our rank, which is not our own but Fortune's."

Nevertheless on the same day, April 10, Shelley was sufficiently open-minded to write John Gisborne: "What think you of Lord Byron's last volume? In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since the publication of 'Paradise Regained.' 'Cain' is apocalyptic—it is a revelation not before communicated to man." It is in this letter that he remarks, "'Prometheus' was never intended for more than five or six persons." And of *Adonais*: "You know I don't think much about Reviews, nor of the fame they give, nor that they take away. It is absurd in any Review to criticise 'Adonais,' and still more to pretend that the verses are bad." The next day, (April 11), writing to Horace Smith, he disclaims any share in *Cain*: "Lord Byron has read me one or two letters of Moore to him, in which Moore speaks with great kindness of me; and of course I cannot but feel flattered by the approbation of a man, my inferiority to whom I am proud to acknowledge.— Amongst other things, however, Moore, after giving Lord B. much good advice about public opinion, etc., seems to deprecate MY influence on his mind, on the subject of religion, and to attribute the tone assumed in 'Cain' to my suggestions. Moore cautions him against my influence on this particular, with the most friendly zeal; and it is plain that his motive springs from a desire of benefiting Lord B., without degrading me. I think you know Moore. Pray assure him that I have not the smallest influence over Lord Byron, in this particular, and if I had, I certainly should employ it to eradicate from his great mind the delusions of Christianity, which, in spite of his reason, seem perpetually to recur, and to lay in ambush for the hours of sickness and distress. 'Cain' was *conceived* many years ago, and begun before I saw him last year at Ravenna. How happy should I not be to attribute to myself, however indirectly, any participation in that immortal work!—I differ with Moore in thinking Christianity useful to the world; no man of sense

can think it true; and the alliance of the monstrous superstitions of the popular worship with the pure doctrines of the Theism of such a man as Moore, turns to the profit of the former, and makes the latter the fountain of its own pollution. I agree with him, that the doctrines of the French, and Material Philosophy, are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism; for this reason, that the former is for a season, and the latter is eternal."

With this typical statement of Shelley's religious position the reader who seeks the history of his thought in his words may well turn from the letters to the consideration of the last poems. For the letters of the last three months of Shelley's life have to do mostly with affairs, some relating to the still importunate Godwin, others to the boat in which Williams and he were so wholly absorbed, others still to Clare, who bore the loss of Allegra with more composure than could have been hoped from her previous actions. There is a passage, however, in a letter of June 18 to John Gisborne which can scarcely be omitted: "The 'Adonais' I wished to have had a fair chance, both because it it a favourite with me and on account of the memory of Keats, who was a poet of great genius, let the classic party say what it will. 'Hellas' too I liked on account of the subject—one always finds some reason or other for liking one's own composition. . . . I write little now. It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write. Imagine Demosthenes reciting a Philippic to the waves of the Atlantic. Lord Byron is in this respect fortunate. He touched a chord to which a million hearts responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them, disciplined him to the perfection to which he now approaches. I do not go on with 'Charles the First.' I feel too little certainty of the future, and too little satisfaction with regard to the past to undertake any subject seriously and deeply." To this may be appended a passage from a letter to Trelawny of June 18 asking that he procure some Prussic acid: "I would give any price for this medicine; you remember we talked of it the other night, and we both expressed a wish to possess it; my wish was serious, and sprung from the desire of avoiding needless suffering. I need not tell you I have no intention of suicide at present, but I confess it would be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest."

These words would seem to imply that Shelley believed, after all his doubts and hesitations, in the final annihilation of death. But

there is a passage of even later date, June 29, in a letter to Horace Smith, of a contrary tenor. He is writing of the political situation in England and Ireland: "It seems to me that things have now arrived at such a crisis as requires every man plainly to utter his sentiments on the inefficacy of the existing religion, no less than political systems, for restraining and guiding mankind. Let us see the truth, whatever that may be. The destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded, that he was born only to die; and if such should be the case, delusions, especially the gross and preposterous ones of the existing religion, can scarcely be supposed to exalt it. If every man said what he thought, it could not subsist a day. But all, more or less, subdue themselves to the element that surrounds them, and contribute to the evils they lament by the hypocrisy that springs from them." His disbelief that man was "born only to die" is at odds, superficially, with his longing for perpetual rest. Yet does not one express a conviction and the other an emotional mood, both common to all thinking beings? There is, to be sure, in his words no triumphant belief in the hereafter nor desire to enjoy it. After the disappointments and disillusionment of this life, to the weary mind cessation is enough. But the reason is not satisfied. Despite its inadequacies, it is hard to believe life is wholly futile and meaningless. The speculations of philosophy do no more than elaborate on this inner belief. Shelley had wandered far in the labyrinths of speculation and at the end could say little more than at the beginning: that life brings more pain than pleasure and that to be freed of it is good; but also that it is purposive and that the individual has his obligation to improve the lot of mankind. Why? It is an inner compulsion. The postscript of his last letter, which was to Mary, reads: "I have found the translation of the 'Symposium'." It may be thought symbolic or prophetic.

The completed lyrics of 1822 are few though lovely. Several—the greater part—are addressed to Jane Williams, including the one *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient* so useful in the interpretation of *The Witch of Atlas*. There is also the lyric which begins "When the lamp is shattered," a dirge for the loss of love—whose can only be guessed. The *Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici* are likewise ambiguous, though if they have a human object, as it would seem they have, it is hard to see who other than Jane Williams is meant. I do not believe it is far fetched to read into these lyrics his love for Jane Williams, whether the love of the moth for the star or a love which has been requited. From their tone and temper they would seem not to record a love which had possessed its object; or if so, at the command of

obligations to others, one which had later been denied. Of the fragments of this year, also, is the lyric beginning "We meet not as we parted," a record of some experience unknown. Then there is *The Zucca* with its suggestion of *The Sensitive Plant* and another poem or drama which was to have been called *The Magic Plant*. If the arcana of Shelley's imagination are ever wholly explored the significance of the plant may sometime be guessed, for its employment in his verse suggests that it has a symbolical meaning such as have the cave, the boat, and the stream.

✓ Last of all is *The Triumph of Life*, the long poem left incomplete at the time of his death. Much of it, Mary Shelley tells us, was written while Shelley sailed with Williams in the boat which was to be their death. Evidently the poem was designed to deal with those ultimate questions with which Shelley in his latter years was pre-occupied; and had it been completed, had he given his definition of life, it would be less difficult than it now is to state precisely what his philosophy had become. What he has written is evidently but the prelude, the introduction, to an exposition of his thought. Yet though its incompleteness is evident, the fragment is instructive, for its kinship with other of his Platonic speculations is evident, and in the light of them it is reasonable to infer the general character of what he has left unsaid. Shelley's philosophical evolution follows a curve whose course has been thus far plotted. What would have been its completion, though it cannot be determined with certainty, can be guessed.

✓ The first forty lines of the poem, written in terza rima, of which Shelley had acquired so deft a mastery, merely set the stage for the vision seen in the poet's trance. In that waking dream he finds himself beside the dusty public way on which people are "hurrying to and fro"—

Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,—

All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know

Whither he went, or whence he came, or why

He made one of the multitude.

✓ The description is of mankind, old and young, hurrying blindly on the dusty way of life, pursuing or fleeing shadows:

And others, as with steps towards the tomb,

Pored on the trodden worms that crawled beneath;

And others mournfully within the gloom

Of their own shadow walked, and called it death.

So absorbed are they in their own illusions that they—

Heard not the fountains whose melodious dew

Out of their mossy cells forever burst,

Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told

Of grassy paths and wood-lawns interspersed

With overarching elms, and caverns cold,

And violet banks where sweet dreams brood; but they

Pursued their serious folly as of old.

The symbols of fountain, dew, and caverns which Shelley employs in *Prometheus*, *The Witch of Atlas*, and elsewhere establish the Platonic character of the thought. Those on the dusty road of life's illusion do not know the reality which springs from the fountain of divine intelligence in the cavern of contemplation and which falls in dews of thought. Reality lies in the inner life.

There appears on the road a chariot and a Shape seated, an obscure and deformed Shape. The chariot is guided by a Shadow, "Janus visaged":

All the four faces of that charioteer

Had their eyes banded; little profit brings

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,

Nor then avail the beams that quench the sun,—

Or that with banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been or will be done;

So ill was the car guided—

The general meaning is clear: the car of Life, for so, shortly, it is identified, moves swiftly and blindly on its way, without knowledge of past, present, or future. The shapes which draw the car in "thick lightnings" are described as "lost." I take the passage to mean that Life is charioted by blind force, electric in character as Shelley has elsewhere described it in *Prometheus* and in *The Witch of Atlas*. This force, expending itself purposelessly, leading nowhither, and the chariot with its deformed Shape within, excite the crowds upon the way to mad exultation. The captive multitude are those "grown old in power or misery," "all who had their age subdued by action or by suffering," "all those whose fame or infamy must grow," until



the earth itself is lost in the "great winter." Captive to the car of Life are—

All but the sacred few who could not tame  
 Their spirits to the conquerors, but, as soon  
 As they had touched the world with living flame,  
 Fled back like eagles to their native noon,—  
 Or those who put aside the diadem  
 Of earthly thrones or gems...

These, whether of Athens or Jerusalem, have escaped enslavement. The contrast is drawn clearly between the children of this world and the children of light.

The ensuing lines descriptive of those who dance before the car, "tortured by their agonizing pleasure" and "like moths by light attracted and repelled," imply seemingly those who are consumed by the pleasures of sense, of the earthly Venus, whom I take to be meant by "her who dims the sun." These the car of life passes over and of them is left no trace. Nor are those who follow the car, the "old men and women foully disarrayed," less objects of pity than the young destroyed by the madness of their desires:

But not the less with impotence of will  
 They wheel, though ghastly shadows interpose  
 Round them and round each other, and fulfil  
 Their work, and in the dust from whence they rose  
 Sink, and corruption veils them as they lie.

The poet "struck to the heart by this sad pageantry" asks, half to himself, what is the shape within the car. To this question a voice answers "Life." The word is spoken by a Dantesque shape which the poet had mistaken for—

...an old root which grew  
 To strange distortion out of the hillside...

The form thus degraded to inhuman likeness is that of Rousseau:

... "Before thy memory,  
 "I feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died,  
 And if the spark with which Heaven lit my spirit  
 Had been with purer nutriment supplied,

"Corruption would not now thus much inherit  
Of what was once Rousseau,—nor this disguise  
Stain that which ought to have disdained to wear it."

It is the spirit of Rousseau which explains the meaning of the pageant.

Those chained to the car of Life are

... "The wise

"The great, the unforgotten,—they who wore  
Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreaths of light,  
Signs of thought's empire over thought; their lore

"Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might  
Could not repress the mystery within,  
And, for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night

"Caught them ere evening."

Among the great whom Life has conquered and drives captive is Napoleon

Whose grasp has left the giant world so weak

That every pigmy kicked it as it lay;  
And much I grieved to think how power and will  
In opposition rule our mortal day,

And why God made irreconcilable  
Good and the means of good...

The idea is the same which Shelley had before expressed in *Prometheus*:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want; worse need for them.

The figures of rulers, demagogues, and sages, defeated in the battle of life, pass in the pageant, Voltaire, Frederick, Paul, Catherine, and Leopold.

... "Figures ever new

Rise on the bubble, paint them as you may;  
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

"Our shadows on it as it passed away.  
But mark how chained to the triumphal chair  
The mighty phantoms of an elder day;

## Mortality Enslaved by Love

"All that is mortal of great Plato there  
Expiates the joy and woe his Master knew not."

Plato was subdued only by love. Gold, pain, age, sloth, slavery had no power over him. Yet his mortality, enslaved by love, thus expiates its weakness. And with him Alexander and Aristotle, the Roman emperors, and the Popes—

Who rose like shadows between man and God,  
Till that eclipse, still hanging over heaven,  
Was worshipped, by the world o'er which they strode,

For the true sun it quenched.

"Their power," says Rousseau, "was given but to destroy." As for himself—

... "I

Am one of those who have created, even

"If it be but a world of agony."

Whereupon the narrator asks Rousseau to relate the course which brought him to this pass, a request to which Rousseau accedes in a symbolism of doubtful meaning.

The beginning of Rousseau's parable is, by reason of its Platonic imagery, more or less intelligible. A guess may, at any rate, be hazarded as to its meaning. He is in the springtime laid asleep "under a mountain" from a cavern of which emerges a "gentle rivulet"—evidently a symbol of divine inspiration or intuition springing from an obscure place. The rivulet nourishes the flowers and fills the grove with sounds "which whoso hears must needs forget"—

"All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love,  
Which they had known before that hour of rest."

A grove is the symbol both of human life and of the individual mind. The passage seems to say that Rousseau, entering upon the dream of life (which is not reality), is made happy by the stream springing from the divine. Both the joy and the woe of human life are unknown to him, in this, his youth:

"Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore

"Ills, which, if ill, can find no cure from thee,  
The thought of which no other sleep will quell,  
Nor other music blot from memory,—

"So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell;  
And whether life had been before that sleep  
The heaven which I imagine, or a hell

"Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,  
I know not."

Whether this dream world of divine inspiration is a world of Rousseau's youthful imagining, whether a world of meditation in which he is in touch with the divine, it is not, clearly, the life of preëxistence which he thought to be heaven. It is a world or way of existence intermediate between the Divine Reality and the actuality which is life. As the day advances in the flowery grove the light still remains "diviner than the common sun." The genius of the place, "A Shape all light," sheds color and music on the grove and bears in her hand "a crystal glass, mantling with bright nepenthe."

Whoever this bright shape may be or what she may symbolize, whether the Divine beauty or the Divine mind, Uranian Venus, or Minerva, all who live under her sway rejoice, the birds, the flowers, and the trees. Lost in the contemplation of her beauty—

"All that was seemed as if it had been not;  
And all the gazer's mind was strewn beneath  
Her feet like embers; and she, thought by thought,

"Trampled its sparks into the dust of death

. . . . .

. . . "like day she came,  
Making the night a dream; and ere she ceased

"To move, as one between desire and shame  
Suspended, I said—'If, as it doth seem,  
Thou comest from the realm without a name,

"'Into this valley of perpetual dream,  
Show whence I came, and where I am, and why—  
Pass not away upon the passing stream.'"

He asks of the divine guardian of this divine spot, this place of unreality between the heavenly life and the life of earth, to know the meaning of the latter. She grants his request. He drinks from the cup she offers, and a "new Vision" bursts upon his sight, the vision of Life's triumphal car. With this vision the Divine Shape which has granted his request to know the meaning of life fades to his sight and

## The Light of Common Day

is but dimly apprehended as he moves through the wilderness of this world. The meaning here, I think, is evident. The glorious visions of his youth fade into the light of common day and he but faintly remembers the place of his origin:

“More dimly than a day-appearing dream,  
The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep,  
A light of heaven whose half-extinguished beam

“Through the sick day, in which we wake to weep,  
Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost;  
So did that Shape its obscure tenor keep

“Beside my path, as silent as a ghost.”

The meaning of the passage I take to be very much that of Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations*. The Shape is the faint memory of a diviner day.

The memory of the Divine is faint beside the vividness of the new Vision and the “cold bright car” which is the chariot of Life. This crosses the forest—symbol of earthly existence—in glory and splendor surrounded by millions rejoicing in and praising Life. All are borne onward as in a stream. Rousseau, unheeding, undelayed by the “phantom of that early Form” which had granted him this vision, into—

“The thickest billows of that living storm  
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime  
Of that cold light, whose airs too soon deform.”

Then a mystery befell. The grove—which is the symbol of worldly existence or of the individual mind—

“Grew dense with shadows to the inmost covers;  
The earth was gray with phantoms.”

Thereupon ensues an elaborate description of these shadows and their activities:

“... some did fling  
Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,  
Behind them; some like eaglets on the wing

“Were lost in the white day.”

Still others are like elves, or like apes. Some play with kingly mantles; some sit like vultures on the tiaras of pontiffs:

## Then What Is Life?

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“... The old anatomies  
Sate hatching their bare broods under the shade  
“Of demon wings, and laughed from their dead eyes  
To reassume the delegated power,  
Arrayed in which those worms did monarchize  
“Who made this earth their charnel.”

Other shadows sit like vultures on the fists of common men; some like gnats and flies throng about lawyers, statesmen, priests, and theorists. Others fall like snow on beauty and are melted by the youthful glow which they extinguish. Rousseau perceives the origin of these forms. Those from whom they emanate lose all grace and beauty:

“... each one  
Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly  
These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown  
“In autumn evening from a poplar tree.”

And those soonest fall by the wayside—

“... from whose forms most shadows passed,  
And least of strength and beauty did abide.”

The meaning of these shadows emanating from those who surround Life's car and given life by the “car's creative ray” is, in general form, clear enough. The shadows are thoughts, beliefs, superstitions, imaginings which the mind of man creates and which are given life, whether much or little, by the force which is in the “creative ray.” All mind and imagination, that is, are in some degree creative. Few, Shelley says, of these creations of mind and imagination are lost, like eaglets, in the white day. Few, that is, are divine. Most of man's creations, his conventions, superstitions, and cruel desires obscure his life, swarming about king, and priest, statesman, and lawyer; in the form of harsh conventions destroying the innocent joy of youth. And we who generate these obscene thoughts and cruel desires soon lose all youth and hope and beauty. We are destroyed by the evils of our own creation. The poem concludes abruptly with the question:

“Then, what is life? I cried.”—

This he does ~~not~~ answer, but he has shown clearly enough what we make of life: an obscene, an ugly, and a cruel thing.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *The Mind of Shelley*



[SHELLEY'S personality, his social and political beliefs, and his philosophy are revealed by the chronological study of his letters, his poetry, and the fragments of his prose remains. It is possible roughly to summarize him, to sketch the outlines of his temperament and his mind./ Yet the biographer and historian is conscious always of the incompleteness of his picture, its lack of subtlety and nuance. A great mind and a rare nature are not to be put into a sentence or a book. Minds grow. The boy who wrote *Queen Mab* is not the mature man who wrote *Prometheus*, nor is the youth who eloped with Mary Godwin, the husband who bore with her coldness and lack of understanding. Utopian adolescence grows through the misfortunes of life into disillusioned manhood. Much of the misunderstanding of Shelley, much of the falsity of common appraisal, is due to confusing beliefs and acts of his youth with those of his later years. Because his life was short it is easy to think of him always as merely young and not to distinguish what he was at eighteen from what he became at thirty. The chronological study of his work reveals the remarkable rapidity of his growth. His beliefs on most questions altered profoundly in the course of twelve years, and also, if not his character—for fundamental character perhaps does not change or, if so, very slowly—his temperament and his emotional responses to experience. His remark that he had lived a hundred years is not the exaggeration that it seems. It is growth which is the true measure of time.

It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make men better be;  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year.

To understand Shelley it is best to believe that in his thirty years he lived longer, both emotionally and intellectually, than most men live in eighty.

The pessimism and distrust of humanity to which he had come in his last years are not therefore to be adjudged characteristics of his youth. They are the result of the bitter experiences of his intense though brief life. He had attained, before the age of thirty, to an attitude at which thinking men customarily arrive not until a later

time, perhaps at fifty years. Complete disillusionment with earthly existence is the proper prelude to taking leave of it. Shelley had had enough of life some time before his death and without regret felt premonitions that his stay was short. There were various and adequate reasons for his weariness of spirit, his sense of futility. He had been deceived in friendship, disappointed in love, had been denied an active part in the amelioration of social ills, and had, as he thought, failed wholly as a poet. The world had little use for him or his beliefs and was seemingly indifferent to the beauty which he gave it. He had reason to regard himself a failure and unwanted. He had persevered sufficiently in the face of opprobrium and hostility. It was neither courage nor tenacity that he lacked, for he had displayed both in high degree. But if a man's work is not wanted and if he gets much pain and little pleasure from the daily round of life, what reason has he to go on? Shelley had paid whatever debt he may have owed to society, had heaped kindness upon his friends, who, for the most part, requited him with ingratitude, and owed little to anyone. Obligations to Mary and to Clare, largely pecuniary, kept him from suicide. Yet he was deliberately careless, deliberately reckless. His loss was not irreparable to anyone. His wife and child would not starve. Sir Timothy, for the sake of his name and out of his deference to the world's opinion, must see that they did not.

¶ The depth of Shelley's despair of life is to be explained partly by his early altruism. As a youth he held mistaken notions of the world. Of a sensitive and loving nature, his belief in the potential if not actual goodness of man was fostered by his reading in the radical literature of the eighteenth century. Man is by nature good, said the social philosophers. If he becomes evil, his fall is due to the corrupting influences of society. Alter his education and amend social and political institutions; the golden age will then be restored. This is to put the revolutionary philosophy a bit naïvely perhaps and to oversimplify. Yet it is not untrue to the spirit that animated generous-hearted men in France and in England. Before the Revolution and for a few years subsequently, the dream of a transformed world, of a society existing for the good of all, seemed not too incredible. The odd fact is that Shelley, growing to manhood in a world disillusioned of this Utopian philosophy, should have harked back to it and found intellectual and moral sustenance in it. There were of course men who clung to the ideals of their youth even during the Napoleonic era and the black years which followed. But they were in the main discredited and hated. Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt stuck to their guns.



Godwin, to do him justice, did not recant, but he was a spent force. The reform movement persisted amid violence and persecution towards aims which were modest and practical. Even to the reforming mind a perfected society was infinitely remote and to be reached only after many and toilsome steps.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Shelley was early inoculated with the old Utopian philosophy and clung to it amid the most adverse circumstances, against family dissuasion and hostility and against the persecution of his fellows. He was of the stuff of martyrs. Had he not been he would not have survived the early pressure of family and school. He never knew popularity or perhaps he would not so readily have antagonized society. It was not hard, for him, to forego what he had never known. He was toughened to social hostility at an early age and no doubt his character was strengthened thereby, if, perhaps, also warped. Yet the natural beauty and loveableness of his nature led him to seek solace in dreams of a regenerate world, to believe in man's native goodness, and to put his trust in individual love and friendship. It is possible to remain an optimist in the face of social events provided one can believe that human beings are not depraved but sin only through ignorance; or that they are enslaved by a few wicked and powerful kings and priests. If friends remain true it may even be exhilarating to be one of a devoted band bent on dethroning the tyrants. Evil is then a limited and concrete thing, not something all-pervasive and of the nature of man himself. Illusions as to the nature of mankind and the trustworthiness of friends did not long remain to Shelley.

Hogg's treachery dealt him a blow from which he never recovered. To his family, to his University, and to the world he had been able to present a courageous front. In the few months at Oxford he had learned a good deal of the political oppression of the time and the persecution of those who held liberal principles, but he had learned too, that there were some men willing to suffer for their beliefs. It was the heroic individual who excited his admiration. He wished to be another of the small band of patriots, of those who could forget themselves in devotion to a cause. Hogg, to be sure, was clearly not of the stuff of political martyrs, but nevertheless his staunch friend who, though laughing at his fanaticism, was true to him. So Shelley thought. Hogg's treachery dazed him. Hard upon this defection he saw social injustice in the factories of the Lake District and shortly thereafter the terrible misery of Ireland and the callousness with which the well-to-do and the powerful looked upon it. The few

weeks in Ireland taught him the realities of social injustice. He surmised then that the inequalities of the human lot are not to be wiped out by appeals to reason. Selfishness and cruelty are deaf to reason. It asks a spiritual conversion to uproot them. He was a child of the Revolution and had believed naïvely that reason was omnipotent. He learned in Ireland that reason plays small part in the affairs of men. (f

Eliza Westbrook and Elizabeth Hitchener did little to strengthen his faith in human nature and soon thereafter Godwin, whom he had worshiped, showed himself to be, whatever his greatness as a social philosopher, selfish and narrow as a man, devoid of all generosity of spirit and nobility of soul. Had Harriet been of a bigger nature she might have helped him through a bad time. But if she loved him it was but superficially and the miserable sister at her elbow was bidding her stand up for her rights and demand of her husband, heir to a fortune, the scale of living rightfully hers. Mary Godwin saved him from complete despair. Yet their liaison, despite the consolation of love which it brought him, showed, too, Godwin's utter harshness and rapacity and the hypocritical condemnation of a world which practiced furtively what it condemned in him. He was an outcast not because of what he did but because he was open and honest in doing it and because his motives were in accord with his professions. However Shelley may have abstractly perceived the double standard of morality upon which the world is run—the profession and the practice—his own experience brought the reality of it home to him. The Chancellor's decision depriving him of his children, staggering though it was, could only have confirmed what, in his heart, he already knew, that whoever openly flaunts the conventions of society, however hypocritically these may be held, dooms himself to outlawry.

There were friends of course—a few. Hunt, whatever his weaknesses—and Shelley came to know and forgive them,—was honest, and did not profess one thing while practicing another. There was also Peacock, in his own way trustworthy, however cold his nature. There were James and Horace Smith in whom he seems to have trusted and not been betrayed. Yet they were never close to his affections. Later in Italy were the Gisbornes, whom he found unreliable in money affairs; the Hoppners, who believed slander of him; Byron, who said things behind his back; Trelawny, who was trustworthy but whom he came to know too late, at a time when he had grown suspicious of men. There were, too, Williams and Jane

Williams, who were staunch, and Clare, whom, despite her emotional storms, he liked. But Mary Shelley failed him, emotionally, at the time he needed her most. The inwardness of that failure can only be guessed. It may have been due, to a degree that Shelley could not understand, to the deaths of her children and too constant a state of pregnancy. It does not appear that in Shelley's day much was known of the psychology of sex relationships or the need of birth control. Married women progressed from one confinement to another without pause, their maternal history punctuated by miscarriages and terminated only by age or death. It strikes the modern reader as odd that so imaginative a man as Shelley should have had, seemingly, so little notion of what it was like to be doomed to endless child-bearing. It is possible that what he attributed to coldness in his wife was no more than her revulsion against the almost continuous illness of pregnancy. A hundred years ago childbearing was not thought, as it is now, to be pathological.

Domestic infelicities are not in themselves usually sufficient to make a misanthrope of a man—nor even a misogynist of him. Failure of friendship is a more disillusioning experience. If Shelley became, as he did become, increasingly cautious in his friendships, giving himself to new acquaintances with more reserve than once, the cause lies in the instances of Hogg, Godwin, and Byron notably—professed friends who in one way or another abused his friendship. To one of a naturally trusting and impulsive nature this caution and distrust were distasteful, the source of unhappiness unknown to colder natures. Shelley in Italy suffered for a lack of friendly understanding, for a lack of intellectual companionship. Some of the unhappiness of his exile was due to that. Byron, whom he admired as a poet only too generously, he distrusted as a man. This substratum of discernment in him, this common-sense grasp of reality, observable even in his personal judgments, is more evident in his judgments passed upon society. In these, he very early reveals himself a cool, a sound, and a disillusioned critic.

It was not easy for one of Shelley's birth and upbringing to acquire a realistic conception of human society. As son of a wealthy squire and as student in Eton and Oxford he was not brought into contact with the factory slave, the exploited child, the pauperized farm laborer. A discerning eye, no doubt, would detect evidences that all was not healthy in the social order; yet most young men of Shelley's class and prospects would have found the world a sufficiently agreeable place, whose greatest miseries need never be admitted because

never actually seen. The aristocratic classes have usually contrived to shut their eyes to the misery around them, have denied its existence, and to a considerable degree have honestly blinded themselves to facts. That Shelley did not in these respects conform to what was expected of an heir to wealth was due partly to what he saw of human suffering in the north of England, in Ireland, Wales, and Marlow. Even so he might have shut his eyes, might have refused to seek out and, in so far as he could, alleviate the wretchedness which lay aside from the paths of comfortable living. He had, of course, sympathy and imagination. That he was literally a nerve which responded to the "else unfelt oppressions of this earth" was true and can be explained only in part by his reading and the accidents of his life. His sensitiveness and imagination were innate. They made him a great poet but they also made his life a torment. The wretchedness of the human lot exists to the imaginative mind whether seen or hidden, whether remote or far. And if with this ever-present sense of human woe is conjoined an equal sense of futility, of powerlessness to ameliorate suffering, to alter society to what it might be if men but willed it, the unfortunate mind so haunted must often experience moods of the blackest despair.

Some little evidence of success in his writing, some proof that a few people found beauty in his verse and were influenced by his ideas, would have made his last years more productive and happier. His life might so have been altered that the accident of his drowning had not occurred and some years, perhaps many, of usefulness been granted him. There is in the scheme of things, as he wonderingly perceived, a curious dissociation of beauty and goodness from power. He several times noted their discord in lines that have stamped the thought with aphoristic memorableness:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.

The powerful goodness want; worse need for them.

The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom.

So he perceived life to be and marveled, for as a Platonist he thought of humanity as striving to bring the world into accord with the divine pattern of perfect truth and beauty. Those who give the most to the world, the greatest teachers and the greatest artists, the most disinterested and the best are in one way or another crucified by mankind. The reason therefor is not particularly occult. The provincial mind, like the small boy, distrusts anything different from what it knows. Its instinct is to shoot a beautiful bird or a strange animal and

to abuse or to destroy any human being unlike itself. The root cause is fear, fear of all that is unknown, of all that is different from itself however better or more beautiful. In the instance of reformers, great thinkers, and great artists the fear which they excite is that of loss through change. Change means at the best discomfort to many and at the worst loss—loss of money, power, prestige. Minds like Shelley's which rejoice in speculation, which hail a new idea as a find, and which forever seek new forms of beauty are congenitally unable to understand a world which is opposed to all essential change whatsoever and blind to all true beauty.

It is not surprising that the critics abused Shelley's poetry, which was beautiful in a new fashion. But their hatred of him was more intellectual than esthetic. It was Shelley the reformer whom they instinctively feared and hated. Shelley did not set undue store by reviewers though realizing the injury they did his reputation as a poet. He hoped merely to find a small audience unprejudiced by the political Reviews which would find some merit in his verse. It seemed that there was no such audience for him and that he was destined to sterility. Could he have taken the active part which he desired in political and social reform the failure of his poetry would not have mattered. He did not value it in itself but as a means to exerting an influence, however small, on the thought of the world. Shelley wished to aid mankind but mankind apparently would have none of him. The wonder is not that he became misanthropic in his last years but that his misanthropy did not cut deeper than it did. He retained still his pity for the suffering masses of men and reserved his hatred for those who exploited them. In his greater moments he forgave even the exploiters—the kings, the priests, and the rich—knowing that they were ignorant, and that to be callous to suffering, not to feel the wrongs of the social order, is the greatest of all misfortunes. Doubtless implicit in this judgment, this pity for the hard of heart, is the belief that in the long history of the soul there must be expiation for every wrong done. Those who use power unjustly and unfeelingly have a dreadful debt to pay even though they sin through ignorance. Thus Prometheus forgives Jupiter because he wishes no living thing to suffer pain; but the pain which Jupiter must ultimately know will be commensurate with the evil he has done.

It is only for power of thought that Shelley had respect. Power of place, rank, and money he distrusted not only for the injury which they work upon others but also upon their possessors:

All beings are enslaved which serve things evil.

The possession of power is inimical to individuality and before all else Shelley was an individualist, wishing neither to enslave nor to be enslaved. He wanted for himself complete freedom to do and be as he liked, subject only to a due consideration of others. And for everyone he desired an equal freedom. His ultimate philosophy, social and metaphysical, is concerned with the problem of the one and the many, but the philosophy, as is usual with philosophies, merely rationalizes a predilection of his own nature. Deeper than all his theorizing is his passionate instinct for freedom and a freedom won at no cost to others; for he felt, I believe intuitively, that the man who is seemingly free because others do his bidding is not really so. The tyranny he experienced at home and at school undoubtedly strengthened what was in him a basic instinct. He was like a wild thing in his hatred of confinement. For him the confinement proved not to be physical or economic as it had been if he had been born to slave in mine or factory; but the restraints imposed by religion, class prejudice, and moral conventions were scarcely less hateful. He wished to be free both in body and soul and a similar freedom he wished for everyone. His social philosophy and his metaphysics are based on this desire.

Shelley's sex morality has been the theme of endless controversy and doubtless will continue to be so, for many find it difficult to square what they believe to be his practice with the self-evident goodness and unselfishness of his character. Why did he leave Harriet? The answer is simple: he no longer loved her nor she him. Both therefore were free to love elsewhere regardless of the stupid conventions of society. Society makes provision for such situations only by providing for divorce, which was then impossible for Shelley under the laws of the time, or by demanding that the illicit love be discreetly hidden and be not openly flaunted. Shelley felt that his elopement with Mary Godwin was justified by the law of love, which is higher than the laws and conventions of society. Society retaliated upon him in a fashion which, had he been more worldly-wise, he would have anticipated. That he should have continued to feel an affection for Harriet and wish her well was to his contemporaries and most of posterity evidence either of his immorality or, at best, his oddity. He should have parted from Harriet as Byron did from Lady Byron, proclaiming his injuries and his hatred. Love, to the eyes of most, is an exclusive, a possessive passion. It was to him an expansive passion: the more one loved the greater was the power of loving. Those of gross instincts find in such a philosophy justification for indiscriminate license and

the practice of lust, a passion which Shelley felt little if at all. Had Hogg, who desired Harriet, come frankly to Shelley and declared that he loved her, Shelley would not, I believe, have been shocked. And had Harriet reciprocated his friend's love, Shelley would have given her up and remained friends with both. But Hogg's desire was not love and he pursued it in clandestine fashion. Moreover he justified it speciously. Shelley could not understand such immorality. It was contrary to all his best instincts of frankness and unselfishness.

Shelley was too little a mere animal to comprehend fully the gross nature of the average man, which vacillates between license and a morbid asceticism. Shelley detested both grossness and asceticism. Both were crimes against the beauty of life. Love of men and women he thought of as a beautiful thing, an earthly approach to the Divine love, an impassioned friendship. In the kingdom of heaven or in the earthly Utopia which might sometime be Shelley thought of all souls as bound in ties of love and friendship of which sexual attraction is but one form, one to be honestly avowed. A world which justifies prostitution, which Shelley abhorred, has condemned him for laxness in that he seems to justify free love. Be it remembered that this love, in his eyes, is justified only as it works injury to no other. But it is not easy to love variously without doing injury to others who are possessively minded. That, Shelley came to know, and the moral dilemmas which are, I believe, suggested by his letters and poems of the last four years, must have turned on this problem. Virtuous renunciation is a simple solution and perhaps Shelley practiced it. Or perhaps it sufficed him to transmute sex love to a higher, a diviner level, and to accept imperfect human love as but a symbol of that which it is impossible to attain on earth. He seems in the instance of Emilia Viviani to have perceived the dangers of his own instinct of idealization which was prone to confuse the earthly and the divine. Or there is a third solution: he may have endeavored in a perplexed situation to get from it as much happiness and to give as little pain to all those involved in it as it was possible to do. What his particular course in such an instance may have been, and whether it was the best course, we cannot know. But it is due him to acknowledge that he would never deliberately cause unnecessary pain to anyone. The instances of his sacrifice for others display sufficiently the unselfishness of his nature.

In the *Triumph of Life*, in the instances of Plato and Rousseau, Shelley hints that personal love, sex love, is a weakness, a means whereby earth triumphs over heaven. The few, the divinely great,

have renounced all lesser loves for the love of beauty, truth, and goodness, and for mankind as a whole. Perhaps this was the conclusion to which he at last came. He seems, at the end, to have been freed from earthly ties other than those duty prescribed. He loved his wife and child and would have chosen to live if his living benefited them. But he loved something else more and was discontented with earthly things. Though not, perhaps, a common emotion, it is yet far from rare, and it may be the purpose of life, as the Platonists believed, to inculcate it in everyone. Shelley merely arrived at the end of earthly desire at an age earlier than is usual. The affinity, the perfect mate of Platonic theory, if he still sought her, did not exist on the earthly plane; she had become identified with the Uranian Venus, the goddess of intellectual love, and was to be found in no human form. Platonism, like other philosophies, is but the rationalization of human desire, the sublimation of the personal need for completeness. In its concept of the affinity it rationalizes the human hunger for companionship in more earthly terms than in its concept of the soul's union with the One. Yet the two are seemingly fused or reconciled, the reunion with the affinity symbolizing the soul's perfection in the One. It is not easy for the prosaic mind to breathe comfortably in these rarefied regions. What is evident in Shelley's case, all mysticism aside, is his weariness of mortal chains and his desire to know what, if anything, lay beyond the mystery of death.

If, in the discussion of Shelley's emotional life, the impression is conveyed that he was no more than a febrile creature, all heart and no mind, the reading is wholly wrong. That he was a being of sensitive and tender feeling who greatly needed love and companionship is true, but he bore disillusionment and loss with fortitude and the greatest of his powers were intellectual. It has been the purpose of this survey to show, and has been demonstrated by the record of his words, that intellectual curiosity was a passion rivalled only by his compassion for suffering humanity. The emotional and intellectual currents of his life ran deep and ultimately blent when he had found a philosophy which had adequate place for both heart and mind. His was one of the rare natures who think passionately, to whom ideas have the warmth and glow of feeling. It is easy for the reader to forget the power of his thought when absorbed in the intensity of his lyrical passion. It is easy in *Prometheus* to overlook, in the beauty of its expression, the thought which underlies the musical and seemingly fragile songs. He was poet-philosopher to a degree not yet generally recognized, for his philosophy is not easy and is veiled by the beauty



of the symbolism and imagery which he employs. Had he been natural scientist, philosopher, or political scientist the powers of his mind would be more widely perceived. Hard thinking is not credited to poets, who are mistakenly supposed to be wholly emotional. The understanding of Shelley depends upon the perception that he wrestled with ideas to the formulation of a philosophy. It is necessary to trace these ideas, some of them at first irreconcilable, to their ultimate synthesis. Shelley then is seen to be more than an exquisite lyric poet. He is also a thinker who is able to express his subtle philosophy in verse.

|1 Shelley's political and social ideals are the natural outgrowth of his individualism and of the teachings of the French radical school as expressed by Godwin and Tom Paine. To Godwin government was no more than a necessary evil whose burden was to be lightened and ultimately wholly removed as society progressed in knowledge and unselfishness. Men are shaped by the institutions under which they live, sufficient proof that institutions as they now exist are bad. The state should exist for the individual, and the ultimate ideal of society is a loosely organized group of small communities which are governed by public opinion. Representative government, though the best that society immediately offers and preferable to monarchy, aristocracy, and plutocracy, is not the ideal form, for in it the individual has not an equal voice with his fellows to express in public meeting his personal ideals and convictions. Godwin's ideal of the state was that of ancient Athens—though not one based on slave labor—in which the community was sufficiently small so that citizens could rise in public meeting and express each his opinions and wishes, the common course of action to be determined by the vote of the majority. The New England town meeting approximates his ideal of a legislative assembly. Questions which concerned the nation as a whole, the federated group of such assemblies, he believed could be decided by a Legislature of representatives meeting no oftener than one day a year. Complete decentralization of government was the end sought<sup>1</sup> |

|1 The people, in Godwin's belief, as in that of the French Revolutionary political philosophers, are the final source of power. Politically all should be equal, as all potentially are equal in other ways. The inequalities which now exist are due to the evil effects of tyrannical institutions which have warped human beings from their innate propensity to good. These institutions should be limited and in the end eliminated, but the process must be a gradual one, not violently revolutionary, for Godwin disbelieved both in violence and in sudden

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change. Shelley, to whom violence and bloodshed were abhorrent, was by nature inclined to pacific measures. The violence of the French Revolution and its consequent failure—relatively, that is, to its aims—was to him, as to Godwin at the time of writing *Political Justice*, an ever-present warning. Revolutions, to be permanent, must rest on the conviction of a majority of the citizens that change is necessary and must, unless the minority resists change, be peaceful. Change, calculated and directed, progressive reform, is the method by which society can reorganize itself with best hope of permanence. The ultimate force is public opinion and the basic liberty, therefore, is freedom of speech, which demands for its proper expression freedom of the press and publication and freedom of assembly. Thought is the lever which moves the world. It is the duty of everyone to think to the top of his ability and to express his thought freely and fearlessly. In a society in which exists genuine freedom of thought and expression progress without violence is inevitable. If freedom of speech is denied, all the evils of tyranny flourish unchecked by the one force strong enough to control them. It is a philosophy which has not lost its validity in a hundred years. The present state of human society the world over bears witness to its truth.

So, too, did the society of Shelley's day, which equally sought to coerce its citizens and to deny to them their supposedly inalienable rights of freedom of speech, press, and assembly. The period of the Napoleonic wars and of the fifteen years thereafter were a time of tyrannical suppression. Yet the movement for reform continued and was ultimately in part successful despite government prosecutions and violence. That it was successful and permanent was due to the fact that it followed the methods which Godwin and others had advocated. Public opinion was educated and when it had grown too strong the reactionaries capitulated without resorting to the last desperate expedient, coercion by the military. Wellington wished to put the country under martial law but wiser counsels prevailed. Shelley did not live to see this triumph of reason and nonresistance over the forces of suppression and violence. The times in which he lived were dark. Only the revolutions in Spain, Italy, and Greece gave food for hope, and of them, gladly as he proclaimed them in his verse, he was not sanguine. The triumph of liberty he felt to be remote, as *Hellas* clearly shows. The divine event to which creation moves seemed in his darker moments very far off indeed. In this pessimism of his last years he had changed greatly from the enthusiasm of his early youth. The Irish experience had proved disillusioning

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and the subsequent misfortunes of his life had persuaded him of the obduracy of the human mind to the persuasions of reason. Ideas rule the world but ideas are not necessarily good. The ideas of the past are for the most part bad, being outworn, and society and the individual are ruled by the past, by bigotry, superstition, tradition, and custom. The ultimate triumph of good, to a belief in which he clung with a kind of despair, might come only, he implies in *Hellas*, when this earth of ours is destroyed and created anew.<sup>1</sup>

Shelley was a Utopian; his belief in the Golden Age sometime to be was fostered alike by Godwin and by Plato. Godwin was an equalitarian, whereas Plato believed in a class society ruled by the most fit, the men of gold, the creative minds—poets, philosophers, and statesmen. There is a basic antagonism in the two ideals, for Godwin's is founded upon a psychology which derives from Locke and renounces innate ideas; men are the product of circumstance and environment and as those are altered men are altered. Plato's philosophy is based upon the innate differences of men, the individual aptitudes of the soul with which they are born. The aim of society should be to discover these aptitudes and give each man that place in which he can best exercise them. Shelley in his development away from the inadequacy of Godwin's psychology and metaphysics necessarily altered his political and social beliefs to some extent. He desired that all men be free, all equal, but equality of powers can not now exist, for powers are born of the individual soul in its efforts to improve itself and reunite with the One. Presumably, at a time infinitely far, the powers of men, though different, would be equal, but this only in the Promethean age in which all men are perfect in love. Such a belief has no immediate political value. It provides a goal, an aim, for society in the infinite history of its evolution. Yet it does not deny the partial truth of the Godwinian philosophy, for though men create society and build its institutions in their own image, they likewise are the creation of society. The mind, which is creative, can ultimately do as it will and shape the universe to its desire, but only as it frees itself from the past, from the inherited thought that constitutes its medium. We are both free and not free. Best to say, perhaps, that freedom is potential and grows in us with the exercise of the will. So Shelley intimates in *Prometheus Unbound*.<sup>2</sup>

[If society is, then, an evolution, if political and other institutions undergo endless alterations, and if also, men are free to direct their energies, it is of prime importance to establish a goal the attainment of which can be made the incentive to effort. It was the fatal flaw of

the deterministic school of radicalism that while it was "perfectibilian," believing, that is, mankind capable of endless improvement, it provided no philosophical justification for their efforts. If men were as they were because of heredity and environment and were incapable of doing other than as antecedent causes determined, of what use to urge them to improve the institutions of society? Society must improve or no in accordance with its inherent forces. Philosophically it is absurd to urge men to effort while at the same time denying them freedom of action. The utilitarian philosophy evaded this paradox but Shelley early confronted it. A belief in moral freedom becomes fundamental to his philosophy and therewith, in his political speculations, the definition of the kind of society which man, a free agent, should seek to create. He must have a goal for which to strive: an ultimate goal, and a series of intermediate goals on the way thereto. There is in this duality no essential paradox; we may hope ultimately to create the kingdom of heaven on earth and yet be satisfied with the effort of fifty years which eliminates poverty. There is, therefore, in Shelley's poetry his picture of the Golden Age, the goal of striving humanity; and in his prose is the statement of the immediate, the practical steps which reform may take on the road to so remote an objective. |

|The Golden Age which he describes in *Prometheus* and elsewhere is the kingdom of heaven brought down to earth. To man made perfect in love, laws, institutions, and rulers are all unnecessary. Shelley's ideal is a state of pure anarchism in which each one obeys his own impulses and gratifies his own desires. Inasmuch as no man can wish to injure another there need be no law to restrain him from antisocial acts. Out of perfect love combined with perfect wisdom he can do no other than act rightly. He is creedless, tribeless, and without loyalties save the one embracing loyalty—love of mankind. This suffices him. He acknowledges but one law, the law of love. It follows, therefore, that women are made men's equals in every respect, are free to follow the dictates of their hearts and are not stifled by custom and convention. Shelley felt strongly that a civilization is to be judged by the position of its women. When they are enslaved men also are enslaved. If he seems in his sex morality to advocate promiscuity or free love, be it remembered that he is thinking of a humanity other than ours, one in which selfishness, possessiveness, and all cold and cruel passions have been outgrown. The problem, in such an emancipated society, of the care of children or of provision for the next meal simply does not arise. Presumably mankind has eliminated

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toil and want through skill in the inventive arts. Shelley believed with Godwin that most of the slavery of the world was already unnecessary. Machines could eliminate drudgery; simpler wants and the avoidance of luxury and display could greatly reduce the time and labor expended in the production of needless articles. It wanted only different social ideals drastically to reduce man's servitude to toil. In a better society than ours men would share their goods. Property would be held by society as a whole for the common good.

| Shelley's ideal society may justly, therefore, be described either as anarchism or communism, for he has no interest in the mechanics of its operation. Economic wants take care of themselves when man is no longer interested in economic and social rivalries. Problems of production and distribution such as the machine age was creating did not concern him, though he was well aware of the human evils which had resulted from the factory system and the enslavement which it was causing. Godwin shows himself deficient on the side of economics and it is not evident that Shelley read much in the field of economic writing. He was alive to the inequalities of wealth and to the unequal tax burden imposed on the poor, but his remedy for these abuses was political rather than economic. In his day the cure for social ills was legislative and the establishment of a more democratic form of government. It was not until the burden of industrialism had become greater, towards the middle of the century, that the application of the democratic principle to economic problems gave rise to socialism. At a later time Shelley would have been a Socialist and in our day either a Socialist or a Communist. By reason of his dislike of violence and his belief in intelligent and gradual change he would, I believe, have been a Fabian Socialist, content to work practically for any immediate object which seemed to him desirable. \

| For what is remarkable in Shelley in view of his idealism, is his practical political sense—his realistic sense—of immediate political reforms. His posthumous book, *A Philosophic View of Reform*, is far from visionary and in our eyes is scarcely even radical. He believed in the ideals of democracy and wished gradually to alter political institutions in accord with them. He would extend the franchise and reduce the property qualification of electors. But he did not think the time ripe for manhood suffrage, nor did he believe women yet ready for the vote. In such an avowed feminist as he, the sane practical character of his immediate program is the more remarkable. Shelley's first enthusiasms either for persons or for ideas were apt to be extreme. His second thoughts were cautious and sceptical. Beneath his

deceptive, febrile manner was a cool and searching intellect. He remained fundamentally agnostic to all beliefs, though allying himself to those causes which most appealed to him, and provisionally accepting a philosophy which best satisfied his doubts. The enthusiastic idealism of his youth was early tempered by a sense of human realities with which in various capacities he would have been competent to deal. His careless management of his finances was due to his indifference to money, not to lack of acumen, for in his letters relative to the legal entanglements of his inheritance he reveals a lawyer's grasp of the facts. Associated with a master of practical politics such as Francis Place, Shelley in his later and disillusioned years would have maneuvered for the advancement of democratic principles with boldness and success. His early advocacy of the methods of passive resistance to tyrannical measures reveals no less the realistic than the idealistic character of his mind.

It is necessary to stress the realistic character of Shelley's mind and then to propound a seeming paradox, that this realism is in no sense incompatible with his leaning towards mysticism. Only to simple souls are realism and mysticism mutually exclusive philosophies or attitudes of mind. Indeed, it may plausibly be argued that only as the mind perceives the boundaries of the visible and tangible world is the invisible world intelligible. The professed realist may, and usually does, deny the existence of the invisible world, but in so doing does not acquit himself intelligently. Whatever the universe as a whole may be, nothing is more sure than our failure to grasp it by the processes of reason and the inherent impossibility of reason unaided ever apprehending it in its entirety. Glorified common sense, which is science, makes its characteristic approach to the riddle. It is but one way of seeking to read the mystery and it too easily assumes, as its power of prophecy increases, that it understands the phenomena upon which it bases its prophecies. The world is less simple a thing than the pure rationalist will admit. Holbach, whom Shelley as a youth so admired, declared that the universe had always existed and was controlled by its own inherent laws. Beyond these assumptions he did not go; he was by temperament unconcerned with metaphysics. However adequate as a basis for materialistic science such a premise may be it does not suffice for the philosopher. There are many, perhaps an infinite number, of ways of apprehending the universe. The realist is concerned with but one, an important one admittedly, for it has as its object the manipulation of matter and force in the service of man. But beyond that what? If the realist con-

tents himself with the manipulation of matter, pragmatically his position is sound. It is the assumption that matter constitutes the whole of reality which is unwarranted.

To the poetic mind and the mind with a bent for mysticism the world of sensory appeal may seem in certain moods the least real of the forms of experience. The unreality of phenomena as an emotional experience is a matter of literary record. It is no doubt an experience known to many who have left no record of it, and is perhaps universal in childhood though subsequently forgotten and disavowed. There may be a medical name and nervous explanation of it, associating it with novel experience or states of fatigue. It remains emotionally valid nonetheless and the memory of it must color any subsequent rationalization of experience; it must be a part of any personal philosophy. Wordsworth's description of the mood is explicit. For him, philosophically, as for other mystics, the unreality of the external world serves to emphasize the reality of the world back of it of which it is the illusive shadow. To Blake likewise it was clearly a frequent experience. Philosophically Berkeley and the neo-Platonists base their doctrine of the sole reality of thought upon the same assumption, whether emotionally apprehended or intuitively known. From the character of Shelley's poetry it is evident that he constantly sought behind the flux of experience, behind the unstable forms of matter, for some constant, some unchanging principle or pattern. Reality to the Platonist does not consist in the visible phenomenon but the thought behind it of which it is the imperfect manifestation. In what sense, then, is Shelley the realist which I have named him?

He is a realist in both senses of that misused term. In the Platonic and exact meaning he is a realist insofar as he perceives a creative mind behind the evanescent forms of things. In the usual and worldly sense he is a realist in that he perceives the actual character of phenomena. A more exact terminology would discriminate between the "actual" and the "real." What we usually denominate "realism" has to do with the actual world of visible and tangible phenomena. The more exact term would be "actualism," to which study science is the proper approach, for its concern is with the operations of matter and force in their sensory effects. The study of "reality" as distinguished from "actuality" is the province of metaphysics. That the two branches of philosophy, science, which is concerned with the "actual," and metaphysics, which has to do with the "real," are frequently confused, and the demesne of the one belittled to the

aggrandizement of the other, should invalidate neither. It is the obligation of the clear thinker to distinguish between the two and do justice to each. Shelley was both scientist and philosopher to a degree rare in a poet. It may be said of him as of few that he looked with an impartial eye both upon the world of matter and of thought and endeavored to reconcile them or synthesize them in his philosophy. It is evident in his poetry, I believe, that his poetic grasp of the external universe, his ability to render it in terms of color, sound and touch becomes more exact and sure as his metaphysical doubts were allayed and he attained a philosophy. His earlier verse, at a time when his mind was in a state of flux and his philosophy confused, is less vivid and concrete than is his later verse when he was an avowed Platonist and mystic. Logically this should be so. Clarity of thought is necessary alike in science, in metaphysics, and in verse.

It is germane in this connection to note in Shelley the development of a psychic sense. To dismiss as hallucinations some of the experiences of his last years as recorded by Trelawny and Medwin is the easiest course for a biographer unsympathetic with all that smacks of the occult. He may charitably concede that Shelley had become, or had always been, a little mad. It depends, of course, upon the definition of madness. Those who believe sanity a rare state of mind and the denizens of this world for the most part a little "touched" may justifiably hold that Shelley became more rather than less sane as he grew older and that the psychic experiences attributed to him are evidence not of his mind's failure but of its increasing grasp of reality. It is not easy, surely, to make much of a case for average humanity, so easily whipped to fanaticism and fury, led to the shambles in war, the victims of bigotry, superstition, national megalomania, and race hatred. Shelley observed these phenomena in his day, which was much like our own, and felt pity for those ridden by nightmares and absurd delusions. He was eccentric in that he was unaffected by mass hysteria. Perhaps to be sane is to be, in the eyes of the world, mad. Shelley's dissatisfaction with life, his impatience with continued existence, was accompanied, it may be, by intimations of a better life beyond ours, and these intimations took the form of unusual mental experiences. The evidence we have of them is not sufficiently exact nor authentic to make extended speculation about them profitable. But to believe them evidence of Shelley's madness or queerness is surely for the critic to assume in himself greater mental powers and a more assured sanity than in the object of his criticism. Shelley has never shaped well to worldly standards—in his ideas, his morals, or in



a lively sense of what was to his best interest. The world, therefore, while finding in his work much that pleases it, dismisses the rest as meaningless.

For this dismissal the difficulties inherent in his longer and more philosophic works are partly the cause. It is possible to read most of them with some pleasure while deriving no particular meaning from them. The imagery and lyric skill which they display suffices for many readers. It is possible to think of them only as verbal music or as such dissolving and enchanting patterns as are thrown on the screen by the clavilux. The appeal of poetry is complex: to one tone deaf it may suffice in its evocation of form and color, and another it may satisfy as music satisfies. Such readers do not ask that the poem mean anything in an intellectual sense. Many are persuaded that poetry can have no deep, no philosophic, import and are impatient with those who insist that it may and sometimes does. What may be their conception of the creative mind it would be interesting to discover. A poet apparently spins his web as does a spider in response to some native instinct and does not himself know what he is about. The intellect, presumably, has no part in the process. If a line is musical and evokes beautiful images or conveys an emotion, that is enough. It is true that some poetry does no more than one or all of these things. A lyric may be as devoid of intellectual meaning as it is possible for any grammatical combination of words to be. Imagist verse is sometimes no more than this, though imagist verse at its best suggests a thought which it does not explicitly state. But verse with this restricted appeal is only a part of the larger field of poetry. Some idea, some intellectual purpose, is apparent in most of it and a limited part is definitely philosophical. To understand it wholly it is necessary to know the poet's intellectual background and the history of his mind.

Shelley suffers, in the understanding of his philosophic poems, by his great skill as a lyric poet. The reader looks in his longer poems for those qualities which are displayed in the ode *To a Skylark* or in the *Indian Serenade*. Finding them, mixed with other matter more obscure, he is content. The effort to understand Shelley's philosophy, even when it is admitted that such exists in his verse, is greater than most readers will expend. Not many care to wrestle with neo-Platonism or other mystical philosophy, or to read up on the scientific thought of Shelley's day. Shelley must ever suffer from the limitations of his readers. *Prometheus*, *The Witch of Atlas*, *Hellas*, *The Triumph of Life* and to a less degree others of his longer poems, are written

only for a few, those prepared to make some study of his mental background and to learn the language of his symbols. For the symbols which he employs present a further obstacle to his comprehension. The usage of these may be traced and their language understood but only with some effort. They have their roots in philosophy. The neo-Platonic symbol of water in its many forms and a few other and related symbols Shelley adapts to his uses, adding some modifications of his own, until stream, boat, cave, and the rest become a familiar and habitual language, whose difficulty for others he did not himself comprehend. The reader, to master it, must expend time and effort and probably even then will not wholly succeed unless he has some flair for the mystical philosophy from which it derives. To Shelley this seemingly solid world of things is in itself only a symbol, a shadow of the divine world of ideas. It is evanescent and imperfect. The discerning mind sees in it intimations of the reality which dwells behind it. Poetry is the revelation of this divine reality.

Intelligent and precocious youth agitates itself with the eternal questions and tries to find a philosophy adequate to its needs. Shelley's letters to Hogg after his expulsion from Oxford, and those to Elizabeth Hitchener of the same period are concerned with the nature of God, existence, morality, society and all serious concerns for which an answer must be immediately found. Shelley was an intellectual young man of a rather dreadful seriousness, differing little, seemingly, from many other very young men then and since. But whereas youth for the most part makes its compromise with the world and for a philosophy has to be content with something to cover its workaday needs, Shelley made little compromise with the world and traveled far to gather the constituents of his beliefs. Nor can it be said that he had at the last satisfied himself with the synthesis which he achieved. It provided an hypothesis which met most of his needs, reconciling science, metaphysics, and social philosophy in workable fashion. Having achieved so much, a tentative unity, he was not so tormented with doubt as he had been at an early time. But whether his peace of mind betokens exhaustion and a breathing space only, rather than satisfaction, is unsure. Near the end of his life he remarks in a letter that he is no longer troubled by some of the questions which once had so greatly vexed him. Yet he left unfinished his *Triumph of Life* whose last line reads—

“Then what is Life?” I cried.—

If he had a satisfactory answer he did not live to put it into verse.

The various constituents of Shelley's philosophy can be inferred with reasonable assurance. His letters list many of the books which interested him, his prose is helpful, and there are annotations to *Queen Mab* informative of his early reading and beliefs. Lord Monboddo, possibly, and Spinoza, Berkeley, Plato, and some of the neo-Platonists mark his progress away from the narrow necessitarianism of Holbach to the more liberal doctrine to be designated loosely as Platonism. Yet he retained in his final creed or hypothesis elements of his early beliefs. Much of his social philosophy and much of his science he had necessarily to reconcile with his Platonism. The resultant philosophy, therefore, composed of elements whose origins are so widely dispersed, is his own. He achieves a system which is not quite like any other despite its resemblances to mystical philosophies earlier than his, and its anticipations of philosophies subsequent to his death. Like all original thinkers Shelley looks both ways, summing in his thought the best of the past and intimating thought which is to be. That some of this latter thought does not derive from him but from others moulded by similar forces and enjoying the same heritage as his is due to the fact that his philosophy has been too little understood to have been influential, save in mood and spirit, on subsequent minds. His poetry has undoubtedly moved many who have but felt its implications. Such an influence, however, can scarcely be called intellectual as yet. It may be that his thought, which can in our day be more clearly perceived than hitherto, has only now assumed its rightful place and is not yet, nor is soon to be, outmoded.

For the philosophical task which Shelley set himself, and whose accomplishment was necessary to his peace of mind, was no less than to reconcile the thought and the methods of science with that body of mystical speculation which may be called Platonism: an ambitious project, but one the way to which had been pointed by some of the scientific philosophers and metaphysicians whom he had encountered in his extensive reading. The range and depth of that reading has been little appreciated nor its implications understood. Shelley could neither dismiss the discoveries nor the methods of science nor could he withstand the fascinations of idealistic philosophy. He had in some way to reconcile these seeming opposites. The way thereto was indicated by the speculations of Newton, Darwin, and Davy who conceived of matter as no more than one of the manifestations of force. What then was this intangible something, force? To Newton it was the luminiferous or electric ether; to Darwin, some form of fire; to Davy, electric charges in some state of balance—a

conception anticipating the modern theory of elements composed of electrons. Such an electric conception of the universe has its manifest resemblances to the Platonic theory of a universe animated by the divine fire which pours from the ever-flowing fountain which is the One, source of all things. God, the One, sums in himself all energy, all beauty, all thought. Thought, energy, matter—all are manifestations of the divine fire, the ether, or in modern terminology, electricity. That Shelley had translated the Platonic conception in terms of the speculative science of his own day is particularly manifest in *Prometheus* and *The Witch of Atlas*.

The more imaginative speculations of science therefore afforded Shelley a way out of the materialism which he had so enthusiastically embraced in his adolescence and which he celebrated in *Queen Mab*. Very early he perceived the restrictions which a materialistic and necessitarian philosophy imposed upon his hope of a transformed world and the attainment of Utopia. If man was not a free agent, of what use to urge him to put forth effort, to sacrifice immediate pleasure for the good of posterity? Materialism and necessitarianism must in some way be obviated or reduced to a subordinate place in the scheme of things. The answer, however, must be found not by a repudiation of science and the scientific method but in science itself. Therefore the importance of Newton and his successors who made science contribute to metaphysics and who reasoned that obdurate matter was itself as immaterial as thought. The neo-Platonists had found matter an obstacle to their doctrine of reality. Matter, it seemed, was not real; yet its baffling half-existence was an impediment to the unity of their doctrine. It was in Newton and Davy with their immaterial concepts of matter as force, and force, in all its various manifestations as one, that Shelley found his way to a monistic theory of the universe in which matter and being—all the phenomenal world—are conceived of as but manifestations of thought. The universe then has its existence, its reality, in the mind of the One, of God, in whom men, as lesser minds, comprehending each but a small part of the Divine thought, live and have their being.

The spectre of determinism is not, however, banished from such a world, for mind, no less than matter, may be the result of antecedent causes. The problem of the individual in relation to the all-embracing mind is but removed to another, a nonmaterialistic plane of argument. How, indeed, if the individual mind is no more than a part of the Divine mind, can it be free? Its sense of freedom may be wholly illusory; yet, if it is not free, wherein justify effort? And what

of good and evil in a world of no moral responsibility? There are no easy answers to these questions. Neo-Platonism has answers of a sort and it is evident that Shelley considered them and in part accepted them. But neo-Platonism, for all its subtleties, is not happy in its solution of the problem of good and evil. If the One is all-good and all-powerful, how justify in earthly existence its so-evident evil and pain? Neo-Platonism suggests too many justifications for any one of them to be wholly satisfactory. It protests too much that all is for the best and that with emancipated minds we should perceive this to be so. The difficulty precisely is that the human mind cannot ignore evil and pain and no wishful thinking can do away with them. To the human point of view God or the One is either not all-powerful or not all-good. If, as Shelley elects to do, God or the One be thought of as Love, then it is evident that Love has not yet subdued a recalcitrant world wholly to its sway.

Neo-Platonism in a sense conceived an evolving universe. The world of matter, of seeming, follows a process of self-realization, seeking to adapt itself to the Divine plan. Yet it is not satisfactorily explained why the Divine plan was not realized at the outset. Why this painful business of seeking to realize on earth what is already existent and perfect in the Divine mind? There is evident here some degree of imperfection. Only as the Divine mind is itself limited, is itself an evolution, can its manifestation in an earthly evolution have any real meaning. Shelley was too familiar with early evolutionary speculation to ignore so important a part of scientific thought. The evolution of the stars and of all living things had been proved by the science of the eighteenth century. The implications of the evolutionary theory were not generally realized for another century, but to such a mind as Shelley's they were evident enough. Evolution was of the essence of the universe. All living and nonliving things changed forever at the instigation of some inherent force. Man was the conscious agent of that force, or, as Shelley seems in some places to intimate, the sum of humanity constitutes that force. Man in the aggregate is God striving for self-realization. Prometheus may be thought of either as God or as mankind. He is the spirit that animates the world. He reshapes the world in accordance with his desires. When he is wholly free, as Shelley depicts him in the last act of *Prometheus*, he is completely master of the universe.

|| For the enslavement of mankind or of God is self-imposed. The present is enslaved by the past. Law, custom, and superstition hang like chains upon the mind. | Thought is more difficult to destroy than

matter, which is the stuff in which mind realizes the patterns of its ideas. Yet thought outworn must be forever put aside by a conscious effort of the will. All-important is the mind's realization of its power to transcend its past. In *Prometheus Unbound* the ethical crux of the drama lies there. Jupiter hopes to "trample out the spark," to convince mankind that they have no moral freedom. To believe oneself enslaved is to be enslaved. The inability to change, to grow, springs from the conviction that effort is useless, that we are helpless in the face of destiny, that our future thoughts and our future acts are controlled by, and wholly the consequence of, the past. Freedom, for Prometheus and, symbolically for man, lies only in the dominance of love over hate. When love has relinquished revenge, when good has cast out evil, then the moral will is free. In love lies freedom; in hate, slavery. Therefore, Shelley seems to say, it is impossible to free ourselves from the slavery of institutions, traditions, creeds, and superstitions by hating them. They live in our hatred of them. When we cease to hate them we can forget them, and in our forgetfulness they die. So, too, in the moral life of the individual. Remorse lives forever enslaved to its sin, it binds us to that sin. We must forgive and forget the past. The world, as it supplants hate with love, forgets its outgrown gods, and these accordingly die. Free will then, arises from our belief in it and determination to exercise it. Yet only is it true freedom as we exercise it in the spirit of love. We are, to be sure, free to sin; but in so doing we enslave ourselves to the sin.

But in the labyrinths of these ethical speculations it is only too easy to become hopelessly lost. It suffices for the purposes of this summary to stress the evolutionary character of Shelley's philosophy and his insistence upon the all-vital point of moral freedom, a freedom which grows by conscious taking thought and the effort to supplant hate by love. God and man grow then by freeing themselves perpetually from their inadequate first thoughts and by the substitution, therefor, of better. Such a philosophy seems not wholly reconcilable with the neo-Platonic belief in the all-perfect One in whom already exists the Divine plan of evolution. Shelley's conception seems to be more experimental, as of an evolution whose goal is not constant nor known but which must endlessly be redefined, as of a limit constantly approached but never reached. I am content in my own reading of Shelley's philosophy to accept his evolutionary theory and his belief in an infinite series of objectives while conceding to neo-Platonism whatsoever it chooses to believe of finality and perfection in the universe behind and beyond what man can comprehend. The argu-

ment is really carried on upon two planes, the plane of reason which suffices for the practical control of forces in a time-space world, and the plane of intuition of which we have momentary glimpses in our more inspired moments.

Shelley, in the maturity of his thought, concedes the superiority of intuition to reason, accepting thereby the Platonic and neo-Platonic emphasis. It is not that Platonism undervalues reason. Indeed all the best Platonists have been subtle thinkers and logicians; but they were aware, also, of the limitations of the instrument which they employed. As the creation of the time-space universe in which the incarnated mind must live, it is suited to the needs of that life. But it is incapable of seeing beyond the physical world which encloses it. For that another faculty, the intuition, is requisite. Through it we apprehend the true, the good, and the beautiful. No doubt to distinguish the genuine intuition and not to confuse it with our selfish desires is not easy. Neo-Platonism believes intuition the endowment of the best minds, which know without knowing why they know. Lesser minds arrive ultimately by the processes of plodding reason at the conclusions which intuition effortlessly accepts. There are, I suspect, all manner of pitfalls to beset this treacherous ground. The critic of Shelley, unless a professed philosopher, had best avoid them, contenting himself with the recognition in Shelley of the discovery which every thinking man must sometime make for himself: that the unaided reason (understanding) is inadequate to explain this mysterious world in which we live. Whether this recognition of the inadequacy of reason leads everyone who holds it to have faith, therefore, in some other way of knowledge, in intuition, may be doubted. It is possible stubbornly to deny the existence of such a faculty, as the limitedly scientific mind is prone to do. Shelley, having a taste for metaphysics as well as science, had faith in intuition after the neo-Platonic example. Or if faith is too strong a word let it be said that he tentatively accepts, as an hypothesis best suited to his needs, the Platonic and neo-Platonic belief in the primacy of intuition and the secondary place of the understanding, mistakenly designated the reason.

Shelley's mental history progresses, therefore, from materialistic rationalism to mysticism, from one pole of thought to its opposite. In this development he followed the inherent bent of his nature. Strong as was his logical sense and subtle as was his mind, he was, being a poet-philosopher and alive to beauty, not content with the exercise only of his rational faculties. Yet in the acceptance of a

mystical philosophy and the primacy of intuition he was unable to do violence to reason. The appeal of neo-Platonism lay in its recognition of reason as a major, though not the sole, power of the mind; in that partly, and also in the place it accords the imagination as the creative agency both of the One and of man. Thought alone, Shelley seems to believe, is not in itself creative. It must be backed by emotion and the power of the will either to destroy existing forms or to create new. It is not sufficient to unthink Jupiter. He must be emotionally destroyed if he is to cease to be. Nor is hate the destructive agent, for in hate he lives vividly, being intensely imagined. It is love that obliterates him and love which creates what is to supplant him. Love, operating through the imagination and the will, creates in the world of phenomena forms which exist in the mind as ideas only. Imagination seemingly supplies the necessary intensity of emotion to energize the will to action. Through the intuition the imagination learns the divine pattern and fires the will to emulation of it. That such an analysis of the mental powers is approved by any school of psychology I should suppose very unlikely. But Shelley, having accepted the neo-Platonic belief that the reason is a faculty secondary to intuition and imagination, could no longer be bound by a psychology circumscribed by reason. The reason cannot pass adequate judgment on what is greater than itself.

Admittedly, and for reasons given, such a definition of imagination and its powers, is unsatisfactory. In itself it is scarcely more than a form of words. Yet do not the profoundest emotional experiences always elude definition? The passions are never really known save to those who experience them; the imaginative life is unappreciated by one without imagination; and an intuition is meaningless to one who has not experienced it. Beyond the rational faculties and the understanding which receives and classifies sensations are other powers and other experiences. Must these be shut out and their very existence denied by those blind to them? Yet admitting their existence, whom of those professing them are we to trust? Are the experiences of a Shelley or of a Blake to be trusted? Or are they self-deceptions, hallucinations? Everyone must reply to these doubts according to his own nature. The test of beauty aids somewhat. That beauty is truth and truth beauty is a dogmatic assertion; yet to those of an esthetic nature and sensitive to beauty it is one which says much. The neo-Platonists believed that art was one approach to reality, the meditation of the philosopher another. Art may convey truth which no words can define. Shelley was a philosopher but he was also a poet. The



creed to which he gave his adherence was one which had a place both for philosophy and for art. It did not deny the validity of reason but it accepted also intuition and the imagination.

Did Shelley, then, really believe in Platonism? Was he a true mystic? Did the world on which he looked seem to him unreal and merely a shadow of the divine reality? Or did the theories of the Platonists remain no more than theories to be held in lieu of anything better? I doubt that his belief was absolute, though Platonism is increasingly manifest in the poetry of his later years. As he perceived with dreadful clearness the character of human life and realized his inability to alter it as he wished to do to something better, mysticism offered him a refuge and an escape without which he would have been driven mad. Platonism does not deny the poignancy of human experience but asserts only that this experience is not all; it is finite and temporal only. The final and the enduring world, the world of the ideal, is the real world to which the phenomenal world in time conforms. It is a philosophy which supplies a hope, a faith, without which sensitive minds could not go on unless able, as some are, to shut their minds to the actual. Shelley felt too acutely the sufferings of mankind ever to forget them. Art for art's sake, the ivory tower, and all the rest of the formulae employed by a literature which evades life, he had at the time he wrote *Alastor* envisaged and renounced. Platonism enabled him to persist in his efforts to improve a world which rejected him and his efforts. It was therefore useful to him. Nor was he content to accept it uncritically. He combined with it his scientific and his social philosophies and made of the elements so assembled and synthesized a philosophy of his own which served this purpose if no other: it enabled him to endure and to produce—if at the end falteringly—throughout the thirty years of his unhappy life.

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